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**Translated, Edited & Introduced by Peter Cole: The Dream of the Poem**

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## NOTES



## ✧ INTRODUCTION ✧

1. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1988), 5:425. Goitein, who writes, “then ‘the Spanish miracle’ occurred” puts the phrase between quotation marks but doesn’t cite a source, though he seems to be alluding to R. Kayser’s *The Life and Times of Judah Halevi* (New York, 1949), p. 50. Kayser notes that “it is like a historical miracle that . . . the people of Israel in southern Europe enjoyed a golden age, the like of which they had not known since the days of the Bible,” while “orgies of persecution” were occurring not far to the north. My thanks to Mark Cohen for pointing out the link to Kayser. The varying conclusions drawn from the lesson of Spain are treated in succinct fashion by Cohen in *Under Crescent and Cross* (Princeton, 1994), especially pp. 1–14 and 195–99. The leading modern scholar in the field, and in many respects its founder as a serious academic discipline, the late Haim Schirmann also refers to the miraculous nature of the period (below, n. 44, and *Toldot* [1995], pp. 15–16), as does Shulamit Elitzur in *Shirat HaHol Ha'Ivrit biSefarad HaMuslamit* [Secular Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain] (Ramat Aviv, 2004), p. 45. Likewise Ezra Fleischer, with regard to the poem by Dunash’s wife (“Will Her Love Remember,” below), writes: “For if in Dunash’s generation women were already writing poems of this quality, one has to wonder if the secular Hebrew poetry of Spain wasn’t born in miraculous fashion, at a single stroke, as a mature and fully-formed entity in every respect, a perfect being brought forth from absolute emptiness” (“‘Al Dunash Ben Labrat velshoto,” in *Mehqerei Yerushalayim beSifrut Ivrit* 5 [1984]: 202). Ismar Schorsch notes that the term “Golden Age” was first applied to this period by the Lutheran Hebraicist Franz Delitzsch in Leipzig in 1936. (See Ismar Schorsch, “The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 34: 61.) Schorsch examines what he calls the “Sephardic mystique” that was promulgated by German-Jewish scholars. For more on the question of historical distortion in scholarship, see note 70. The “insular poetry” of the first postbiblical millennium includes epithet-laden talmudic elegies and the enormous corpus of hymns from late antiquity and the middle ages; while these hymns can sometimes be quite forceful, they are also limited in their liturgical range and at times wound down to hyper-mannered, coded concoctions that were mocked by the later Spanish poets. Raymond Scheindlin refers to the diction of that liturgical verse as “a special poetic dialect . . . merely degenerate forms of a classical language” (“The Influence of Muslim Arabic Cultural Elements on the Literature of the Hebrew Golden Age,” *Conservative Judaism*, Summer 1982, p. 64). By contrast, the poetry of Spain has been described by one scholar as “a rich and full expression of the poet’s self” (Elitzur, *Shirat HaHol*, p. 67). See below, on *fasaaha* (note 36).

2. The word—cosmos—in many ways takes us to the core of this poetry, which is often spoken of in terms of its “ornament.” “Cosmos” derives from the Greek *kosmein*, that is, to order, and secondarily, to ornament. It is from this cluster of meanings that we get our “ordered world” (as in the pseudepigraphic *Prayer of Manasseh*: “He who made the heaven and the earth with all their embellishment [*kosmo*] . . .”), as well as our word “cosmetic.” For more on this important nexus, see *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, trans. Peter Cole (Princeton, 2001), pp. 11–13; hereafter Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*.

Historian Yom Tov Assis describes the culture of the Christian period as “a brand of Judaism [italics mine] that emerged as a result of the fusion of Jewish tradition with elements of Greco-Arabic civilizations and elements from Romance culture brought by the *Reconquista*. . . . Sefarad was no less authentic or Jewish than Ashkenazi pietism” (“Sefarad: A Definition in the Context of a Cultural Encounter,” in *Encuentros and Desencuentros: Spanish Jewish Cultural Interaction throughout History*, ed. A. Doron [Tel Aviv, 2000], p. 35). His notion of Andalusian Jewish culture as “a brand of Judaism” applies all the more to the Muslim period. For more on *convivencia*, see note 70, below, and the glossary at the back of this volume.

3. In contrast with, say, nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals of the European Haskala (Enlightenment), the Spanish-Jewish elite did *not* succumb to assimilation in the wake of exposure to the foreign. Conversion among the poets was rare in the Andalusian (Muslim) period and became a problem only in Christian Spain. That said, some scholars feel that the destruction of the Jewish community in Spain was an inevitable, even organic outgrowth of that exposure. Surveying the various “apologetic and ideological tendencies” that have informed readings of this poetry since the nineteenth century, Ross Brann notes that the tide has swung from the early modern understanding of the secular Hebrew poetry of Spain as a “model of enlightened Jewish culture” to more recent, and conservative, perspectives that present “challenging critiques that minimize the historical relevance of the Andalusian school and depreciate the ‘Jewishness’ of its poetry.” “According to this revisionist view,” Brann continues, “secular poetry may be relegated to an isolated corner of Hebrew literary history for two reasons: first, because the poets’ obsession with literary elegance and social manners barely found its way to other strata of Andalusian Jewish society; and second, because Golden Age secular poetry had no lasting impact on the course of Hebrew literature, in contrast, say, to the Andalusian piyyut” (*The Compunctious Poet* [Baltimore and London, 1991], p. 16). While the argument can be made that Spanish-Hebrew secular poetry occupied a marginal position with regard to the mainstream of Hebrew and Jewish culture in post-Spanish-Hebrew history, that detracts only from its *historical* relevance and in no way diminishes its power or its value for the present and future. And here it is also important to recall that Andalusian accomplishments in the secular and devotional spheres were integrally linked.

4. As one writer has remarked, “One wonders what the Visigoths ate!” (Stephen O’Shea, *Sea of Faith* [New York, 2006]), p. 85. O’Shea follows by noting that the seventh-century polymath Isadore of Seville was already singing the praises of Iberia’s fertile lands. Anticipating modern Spain’s enormous fleet, Isadore also singles out the fish. Information for this paragraph comes from the following sources: Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (London, 1998), pp. 1, 11–12, and 14 (where he notes the possible link to China); Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca and London, 1975), pp. 117, 141; Richard Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (Berkeley, 1992), p. 53; and S. M. Imamuddin, *Muslim Spain 711–1492: A Sociological Study* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 75–99. Gutas notes that certain paper was named for the patrons of the translation movement, an indication of that activity’s importance. ‘Abd al-Rahmaan III’s mother was Frankish and his grandmother a Basque princess. He is described in contemporary chronicles as being “handsome . . . and equally at home in Arabic and in the emerging Romance tongue.” He reportedly dyed his hair black to make himself look more Arab.

The new Muslim population was deeply divided along ethnic and tribal lines: the conquering troops from North Africa comprised soldiers from rival Yemeni Arab clans (Beni Qalb and Beni Quraysh), both of which looked down on the soldiers drawn from the crude Berber tribes of the Maghreb. The conquered Iberians were also diverse. While the Mozarabs, or Arabized Christians, adopted Arab customs and the Arabic language, they continued to worship in their churches and for the most part were subject to the rule of their own officials and Church law. Many Christians, however, converted to Islam. These converts (*musaalima*) and their children born into the new faith (*muwalladun*) occupied yet another tier in this ethnically charged society-in-formation. There was also a large population of fair-haired slaves (Slavs), brought from the north, as well as darker servants purchased from Africa. Many of the Slavs were eunuchs and took on a range of domestic, administrative, and military functions in the caliphate.

5. Goitein, *Mediterranean Society*, 1:101ff. He notes that textiles of the day were especially durable, variegated, and expensive, and that “clothing formed part—sometimes a considerable part—of a family’s investment, being transmitted from parents to children.” He also comments on what he calls the “color-intoxication” of the age, quoting from orders for textiles and descriptions of trousseaus: “Five fine covers, one gazelle blood, one pure violet, one musk-colored, one silvery, one intense yellow; two others pure, clean white, inclining to yellow. . . . Eight pairs of small prayer carpets, two white, two indigo blue, two green, two red. . . . Please, my lord, the red should be as red as possible, likewise the white and the yellow should be exquisite. . . . The siglaton [gold brocade] robe is of the utmost beauty, but not exactly what I wanted, for it is white and blue, while I wanted to have . . . onion color, an ‘open’ color. The lead-colored [i.e. bluish gray] robe is superb.” According to the Geniza records, Spain was the leading Mediterranean country in the production of silk.

Paper had been produced in the Islamic world from the eighth century on, at first in Baghdad—with the secrets of production having been taken, it seems, from the Chinese. In al-Andalus, Játiva, near Valencia, was a major center for paper production. See Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (New York, 2003), pp. 56–57, who notes that “among the various grades of paper listed by an encyclopedist of technology was a special lightweight type known as ‘birds’ paper’ because it was thin enough to be sent by carrier pigeon: the earliest known airmail paper.” See also Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print* (New Haven and London, 2001), p. 88.

6. Imamuddin, *Muslim Spain*, pp. 130–34; B. Reilly, *The Medieval Spains* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 61–67.

7. Robert Hillenbrand, “Medieval Cordoba as a Cultural Center,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden, 1994), p. 117. Fletcher, *Moorish Spain*, pp. 60–61.

8. The Berber chieftain Taariq Ibn Ziyaad led a legion of some 7,000 men (6,000 of them Berbers) across the straits on April 27/28, 711. A second wave of support troops brought the strength of his army to 12,000 men, and on July 19, Taariq’s Muslim army routed the Visigothic king Rodrigo. The mission’s success notwithstanding, Taariq’s Arab commander Muusa Ibn Nusayr was angered by his lieutenant’s insubordination—since the Umayyad caliph in Damascus had cautioned Ibn Nusayr to limit their mission to intensive *explorations* of the area—and the following spring he gathered a mixed Arab, Syrian, Egyptian, and Berber force of 18,000 and crossed the straits as well, occupying towns Taariq had passed by. Within three years the two armies had secured control of most of the peninsula, before both conquerors were recalled to Damascus. Some years later, another 30,000 troops were dispatched from Damascus to help quell civil unrest.

9. In 749, following several military victories over the Umayyad army, Abu-l-‘Abbaas, a descendant of the Prophet’s uncle (who was known as al-Saffaah, “the spiller of blood”), was named the first Abbasid caliph. The following year, the Umayyad caliph, Marwaan II, was murdered, and all members of the royal family—except ‘Abd al-Rahmaan—were hunted down wherever they were and killed. The new Abbasid caliphate was soon moved eastward, and in 762 the city of Baghdad was founded as its capital. ‘Abd al-Rahmaan, whose mother had been a Berber slave, fled to his mother’s homeland, before settling in al-Andalus.

10. In fact, we don’t know why Ziryaab went west, but the story of his falling out at court appears to be a “later invention” (H. Kilpatrick, in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey [London and New York, 1998], p. 826). For the other information here, see Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent*, p. 59; María Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World* (New York, 2002), pp. 32–33. Some estimate that al-Hakam’s library held 600,000 volumes. By comparison, the library of King Charles the Wise, of France, in the mid-fourteenth century held a mere 900 books, two-thirds of them treating theology (S. M. Imamuddin, *A Political History of Muslim Spain* [Dacca, 1961], p. 97). The Andalusian private libraries also

stood in stark contrast with the situation outside the Arab world. In eighth- and ninth-century Byzantium, “a very modest private library of a few dozen books was beyond the means of most, if not all, rich intellectuals” (Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 176–77). See also Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 38ff.; O’Callaghan, *History*, pp. 107, 158; Hillenbrand, “Medieval Cordoba,” pp. 117–21. On the subject of women’s roles in Andalusia, see Shirley Guthrie, *Arab Women in the Middle Ages* (London, 2001), p. 176. María J. Viguera makes it clear that Andalusian letters and literary culture generally yield a somewhat distorted picture of women’s level of freedom in Muslim Spain, and that the majority of Andalusian women by no means enjoyed “genuine freedom” (“On the Social Status of Andalusian Women,” in Jayyusi, *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, pp. 709–24).

11. In an effort to assimilate, some of the new converts faked an Arabic lineage. Alvarus, the ninth-century bishop of Cordoba, complains that Christian youth were “intoxicated with Arab elegance” (*Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 730). The precise linguistic situation in al-Andalus is not known with any certainty and no doubt varied from community to community. “The language of the fields and streets might be that Romance which had devolved from the old late-vulgar Latin,” writes Bernard Reilly, referring to the largely peasant class of Romance speakers (*The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain: 1031–1157* [Cambridge and Oxford, 1992], p. 21). David Wasserstein explains that poetry in particular attracted the youth of the day. And Moshe Ibn Ezra’s twelfth-century book also testifies to the Spanish Jews’ admiration for Arabic verse (*Sefer Ha’Iyyunim ve-HaDiyunim: al-Kitaab al-Muhaadhara wa-l-Mudhaakara* [*The Book of Discussion and Remembrance*], trans. and ed. A. S. Halkin [Jerusalem, 1975], p. 57; hereafter *The Book of Discussion*). The Jewish population, Wasserstein adds, would have spoken and written Latin prior to their adoption of Arabic, using Romance as their vernacular; both were probably spoken during an interim period. In time, however, Arabic proved dominant, and spoken Arabic became their only vernacular. Most written expression was in a middle-register Judeo-Arabic, which was written in Hebrew characters. Only poetry and a few other “prestige texts” were composed in Hebrew (David Wasserstein, “The Language Situation,” in *Studies in the Muwashshah and the Kharja* [Oxford, 1991], pp. 3–4 and 15). Some Jews probably also spoke Berber.

12. Menocal, *Ornament of the World*, p. 12. The famous characterization is by the tenth-century writer Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, who had never seen the city. Writing from her home in lower Saxony, she based her account on reports that reached her. Her topic was in fact a Christian martyr, Palagius, who (reportedly) died holding out against the homosexual advances of the caliph of Cordoba, ‘Abd al-Rahmaan III (Katherina Wilson, *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: A Florilegium of Her Work* [Cambridge, 1998], pp. 6,10; also John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* [Chicago and London, 1980], pp. 198ff). Scholarly estimates of the city’s population vary widely, from 90,000 to 1 million. (See, for example,

O'Callaghan, *History*, p. 155; Haim Schirmann, *HaShira Ha'Ivrit biSefarad HaMuslimit* [Jerusalem, 1995], p. 100; and Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* [London and New York, 1996], p. 107: "Cordoba was vastly more developed than any of the muddy market towns of northern Europe.") Figures offered for the population of tenth-century Spain as a whole are also unreliable. It is often given by scholars as between 6 million and 9 million residents. The Jewish population is estimated to have been some 1 percent of that—though concentrations of Jewish population were generally considered to have been much higher in the major cities (S. D. Goitein, "Jewish Society and Institutions under Islam," in *Jewish Society through the Ages*, ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson and S. Ettinger [New York, 1971], p. 173; Reilly, *Contest*, pp. 191–92, n. 3). David Wasserstein, however, regards these estimations with considerable skepticism, commenting that "there is no information at all which would make it possible to offer such an exact estimate" ("Jewish Elites in al-Andalus," in *The Jews of Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank [Leiden, 1995], p. 107; also pp. 108–10). He assumes that the number of Jews in eleventh-century Spain was in fact very much smaller than is generally assumed. To the extent that one can get a rough sense of the size of the Jewish population, he concludes, the numbers "show how very much the Jewish people today owes to a very small absolute number of medieval inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula" (p. 110). See also Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* (Philadelphia, 1973/92), 2:190–300.

13. Self-mythologizing Spanish-Jewish tradition traces Jewish settlement in Spain back to the exile of Jewish families from Jerusalem in 586, in the wake of the First Temple's destruction. Scholars assume that the migration of Jews throughout the Roman diaspora (from the second century B.C.E. through the second century C.E.) brought them to Spain as well, as traders, and then as slaves, following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E.; additional waves of Jewish immigration came from North Africa, Italy, and Provence.

14. Assis, "Jews of Spain," p. 11; Ross Brann, "The Arabized Jews," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 435–38. The Arian (non-Trinitarian) Christian and Latin-speaking Visigoths at first treated the Jewish communities they found with relative tolerance, but the situation deteriorated with their conversion to Catholicism in the late sixth century. Harsh legislation was passed, ranging from mandatory observance of Sunday as the day of rest, to the banishment of Jewish children to monasteries (where they were to be raised as Christians), to forced baptism of the entire community, confiscation of Jewish property, and the enslavement of all Jewish wives and children. While this and other legislation wasn't always enforced, conditions in Spain were by no means conducive to communal development, and in fact many Jews fled to areas of Gaul and North Africa that were still controlled by Roman nobility (Jane Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* [New York, 1994], p. 8). See Gerber for the early history of Jewish presence in Iberia (pp. 2–25). For more

on the Visigothic documentation, see *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable (Philadelphia, 1997), pp. 12–23.

15. These regulations were known as the Pact of ‘Umar, an English translation of which appears in N. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 157–58. See also *The Jew in the Medieval World*, ed. Jacob R. Marcus (1938; Philadelphia and New York, 1960), pp. 12–15. Marcus notes there that, by and large, “this pact, like much medieval legislation, was honored more in the breach than in the observance.” For a detailed discussion of the pact and its application, see Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 54ff.

Regarding the overall Arabization of the Spanish Jews, Brann notes, “Before the emergence of their literary culture in the mid-tenth century, the Jews of al-Andalus had been speaking Arabic for generations and thereby came to think in and view the world through the medium of that language” (“Arabized Jews,” p. 441). By the time the Hebrew renaissance was underway, in the eleventh century, it could be assumed that the state of Hebrew letters was such that Jews could also converse in Hebrew, though it is not at all clear whether that was ever done. The spoken language of the Jews of Muslim Spain was without doubt a middle register of Arabic (S. Morag, “HaMoreshet HaLeshonit Ha‘Ivrit biSefarad,” *Pe‘amim* 53 [1992]: 6). See also note 11, above. Wasserstein adds: “In economic life there were scarcely any real restrictions on Jews, or *dhimmi*s. . . . In religious life real constraints on Jewish practice were minimal” (“Jewish Elites,” p. 103). The status of Jewish elites, he adds, was “slightly different” from the status of Arab elites.

16. Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 30–35; Schirmann, *Toldot* (1995), pp. 100–101; Brann, “Arabized Jews,” pp. 435–54.

17. Schirmann, *Toldot* (1995), p. 102.

18. The tenth-century Arab geographers and chroniclers Ibn Hawqal and al-Muqaddasi comment on the “remarkable sea ports” of Andalusia and the extensive network of trade routes they serve. See Olivia Remie Constable, *Trade and Traders in Muslim Spain* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 17. The appointment was hardly honorary, and the job brought with it a great deal of responsibility.

19. For more detailed accounts of Hasdai’s life, see Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 155–263; Schirmann, *Toldot* (1995), pp. 102ff.; Haim Beinart, *The Sephardic Legacy* (Jerusalem, 1992), 1: 15; and D. Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002–1086* (Princeton, 1985), p. 196.

20. See also Moshe Ibn Ezra’s *Book of Discussion*, pp. 56–57, where he describes the cultural awakening around Hasdai and his gathering scholars and works from faraway places. Among other things, Hasdai was interested in the Khazars’ conversion and also asked if they had any knowledge about the reckoning of the end of days. See Beinart, *The Sephardic Legacy*, 1: 16.

21. S. M. Stern notes that while the Hebrew poets themselves “had no standing at all in Muslim society [as poets] . . . some of their Jewish patrons did occupy

positions there, though mainly minor ones. Smaller figures in the outer world, they loomed large in Jewish society: like minor planets in the system of some Muslim court, they formed centers around which their Jewish courtiers (among them the Hebrew poets) moved like so many satellites” (“Arabic Poems by Spanish-Hebrew Poets,” in *Romanica et Occidentalia*, ed. M. Lazar [Jerusalem, 1963], p. 254).

22. Schirmann, *Toldot* (1995), p. 101; Fleischer, “LeQadmoni’ut Shirateinu biSefarad,” *Asufot* 2, (1988): 231–33; Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 244ff.

23. Hasdai’s use of the term is straightforward here. Generally speaking, however, the word “Sefarad” meant much more than just “Spain.” As Yosef Haim Yerushalmi has pointed out, “*Sefarad*, *Tzarfat*, or *Ashkenaz* were not merely fabricated Jewish equivalents for Spain, France, or Germany; they were Hebrew place names lifted out of their biblical contexts and superimposed over the map of contemporary Europe” (“Exile and Expulsion,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World: 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel [New York, 1997]), p. 13. “Sefarad is not Spain,” declares Yom Tov Assis, who describes the trilateral Jewish–Greco-Arabic–Romance cultural symbiosis, rather than any single geographical entity, as its essence (“Sefarad,” pp. 31 and 35).

The term itself appears in Obadiah 20: “And the exile of Jerusalem that is in Sefarad”—though modern scholars understand the word there to refer to Sardis. It is taken to mean Spain for the first time in the Peshitta—the Syriac translation of the Hebrew Bible, which was begun in the first century of the Common Era—and shortly thereafter in Targum Jonathan, one of the Aramaic translations of the Old Testament (made in Babylonia during the early centuries of the Common Era). From the eighth century on Sefarad is generally taken in Hebrew and Jewish literature to mean Spain. Targum Jonathan to Obadiah 20: “‘And the exile of Jerusalem that is in Sefarad’—and the exile of Jerusalem that is in Spain.” See also *Seder ‘Olam Zuta* (a sixth- or seventh-century Babylonian midrash): “Vespasianus came and destroyed the Temple and exiled Israel and many families from the House of David and Yehuda to Espamya [Spain], which is Sefarad” (*Seder ‘Olam Zuta*, ed. A. Neubauer, in *Seder HaHakhamim VeQorot HaYamim*, vol. 1 [Oxford, 1887], p. 71).

24. Hasdai’s letter is curiously reminiscent of Isadore of Seville’s seventh-century description in the prologue to his *History of the Goths, Vandals, and Suevi* (624 C.E.), wherein he sings the praises of Iberia: “Of all lands from the west to the Indies, you, Spain, O sacred and always fortunate mother of princes and peoples, are the most beautiful. . . . Indulgent nature has deservedly enriched you with an abundance of everything fruitful. You are rich with olives, overflowing with grapes, fertile with harvests. You are dressed in corn, shaded with olive trees, covered with the vine. Your fields are full of flowers, your mountains full of trees, your shores full of fish. You are located in the most favorable region in the world; neither are you parched by the summer heat of the sun, nor do you languish under icy cold, but girded by a temperate band of sky, you are nourished by fertile

west winds. You bring forth the fruits of the fields, the wealth of the mines, and beautiful and useful plants and animals. Nor are you to be held inferior in rivers, which the brilliant fame of your fair flocks ennoble” (translated from Latin by Kenneth B. Wolf, in *Medieval Iberia*, p. 3). Hasdai and Menahem’s letter is quoted in Schirmann *Toldot* (1995), p. 100; the translation is mine. The letter, which begins with the sort of mythologizing referred to above (note 13)—“I, Hasdai, son of Isaac, belonging to the exiled Jews of Jerusalem in Spain”—was written some time between 956 and 961. The full letter, with King Yosef’s answer, can be found in F. Kobler, *Letters of Jews through the Ages* (Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 100–101.

25. Into the spine of his poem Menahem embeds an acrostic that reads: “I am Hasdai, son of Yitzhaq, son of Ezra, son of Shaprut, Menahem Ben Saruq.” Acrostics of this sort were normally used only in liturgical poems.

26. Based on one of the recently discovered poems by Menahem, Fleischer writes, “it is possible to see what the Hebrew poetry of Spain would have looked like . . . if Dunash’s innovations hadn’t come to pass. The poem is Jewish to its marrow: all the ideas it embodies are originally Jewish” (“LeQadmoni’ut Shirateinu biSefarad,” p. 253). Menahem’s version of that style appears to be influenced by Sa’adia Gaon’s poetry. His work has not been included in this anthology for that reason: in most respects it belongs to the older style of Eastern poetry, though it was composed in the west, and in a very different social context.

27. See Fleischer, “LeQadmoni’ut Shirateinu biSefarad,” pp. 249–69. Apart from the poem to the Khazar king and the prefatory poem to the epistle to Hasdai (see below), three other poems, all panegyrics, are extant. They were published by Ezra Fleischer in 1988. Fleischer characterizes these, too, as impressive examples of a courtly application of the Eastern style exemplified by Sa’adia, and on the whole he considers Menahem “an extremely talented poet.” Examples of Menahem’s cadenced prose in English translation can be found in T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York, 1981), pp. 277–79, and Raymond Scheindlin, “Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Iberia,” in *Convivencia*, ed. V. Mann, T. Glick, and J. Dodds (New York, 1992), p. 45. In addition to the three “new” secular poems, Fleischer has also uncovered evidence for the composition of liturgical poetry in Spain prior to Dunash’s arrival. The two very brief liturgical poems he published alongside the secular finds clearly demonstrate, he says, that liturgical poetry in the Eastern manner was known to Menahem and the Spanish congregations. Beyond that, he notes, it is hard to imagine that for the 250 years of Jewish life in Muslim Spain prior to Dunash’s arrival, the Spanish cantors sang only foreign liturgical poems and never tried their hand at the various liturgical genres. There are, however, no extant *piyyutim* from this period, apart from the eight lines that Fleischer quotes. That said, there were other poets writing during this initial phase, including the students of Menahem and Dunash. In his *Tahkemoni* (ed. Y. Toporowski [Tel Aviv, 1952], p. 43), Yehuda Alharizi also mentions two other poets by name, Avun and Shmu’el, as well as “many others apart from them, of whose work there is no trace—/for their matter was weak and therefore erased.”

For more on the development of Hebrew verse and the other poets who were active at the start of the Spanish period, see Fleischer, “LeToldot Shirat HaHol Ha'Ivrit biSefarad beReshitah,” in *Asufot, Tarbut veHevrah beToldot Yisrael beYamei HaBenayim*, ed. M. Ben-Sasson et al. (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 197–225.

28. In Menahem's scheme, Hebrew words were composed of one-, two-, or three-letter roots. (The correct understanding of the three-letter root—common to Hebrew and Arabic—would come about only in the next generation, with the work of Yehuda Ibn Hayyuj and, after him, Yona Ibn Janaah.) Menahem does, though, repeatedly demonstrate an appreciation of linguistic elegance and purity. Dunash felt that Menahem wasn't qualified to undertake a dictionary of this sort as he lacked the tools for systematic analysis—though as Schirmann points out, Dunash too had misconstrued the root system (S. Morag, “Mahloqet Menahem veDunash veTehiyyat Ha'Ivrit,” *Pe'amim* 56 [1993]: 9 and 13–14). See also Schirmann, *Toldot* (1995), p. 129.

29. Accounts of Menahem's troubles vary from scholar to scholar. Schirmann, for one, casts doubt on the accusation of Karaism; but whatever the charge was, he says, it had to be serious enough to warrant Hasdai's violation of the Sabbath (*Toldot* [1995], pp. 113–14). Ashtor presents a slightly different version of his catastrophe from the one related here (*Jews of Moslem Spain*, 1: 241ff.).

30. Epistle to Hasdai, in *HaShira Ha'Ivrit biSefarad uveProvans*, 2d ed. (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1959), p. 14, lines 81–85.

31. Morag, “Mahloqet Menahem veDunash veTehiyyat Ha'Ivrit,” p. 14. See also E. Rosenthal, *Judaism and Islam* (London and New York, 1961), pp. 73–76.

32. Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven and London, 1998), pp. 37–38, 236–37, 239. For Sa'adia's poetry, see Brody, pp. 323ff., and Menahem Zulay, *Ha'askula HaPaytanit shel Rav Sa'adia Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1964), pp. 13–40. “Gaon” was the official title of the head of the academy and signified, literally, eminence and great learning.

33. Ezra Fleischer, “Meqomo shel Rav Sa'adia Gaon beToldot HaShira Ha'Ivrit,” *Pe'amim* 54 (1993): 10. His polemical poetry treating religion was notable because it was independent of any liturgical station and as such involved a kind of proto-secular verse.

34. Fleischer, “Meqomo shel Rav Sa'adia Gaon,” p. 7.

35. Nehemia Allony, *Sefer Egron* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 158–59. The extended quotation cited here is from the Hebrew introduction to the first edition. The translation is, for the most part, mine, but see also Brody, *The Geonim*, pp. 247–48. Fleischer comments that Sa'adia's elevation of poetry to this central role was unheard of in Jewish letters since the age of Scripture (“Meqomo shel Rav Sa'adia Gaon,” pp. 6–8).

36. Fleischer, “Hirhurim beDavar Ofyah shel Shirat Yisrael biSefarad,” *Pe'amim* 2 (1979): 17.

37. Both observations are Fleischer's, in “LeQadmoni'ut Shirateinu HaSefardit,” pp. 229–30, and “Hirhurim,” p. 18. A simpler, if cruder, way of putting this

is that the Jews of the early to mid-tenth century in Spain were not open to the ideas of the people around them, although they easily mixed with those people and adopted much of their cultural style; the Jews of Babylonia, on the other hand, were very much open to the ideas of the people around them, but did not easily mix with their neighbors or absorb much of their cultural style.

38. The notion of dictional purity, or clarity (*fasaaha*), based in Scripture comes from the Arabic tradition, where the Quran served as the model. (*Fasaaha* derives from the Assyrian and Aramaic words meaning, among other things, “radiant” or “bright.”) Purity here is a relative term. The lexicon of the Spanish-Hebrew poets wasn’t frozen, and they would ring certain changes on it to increase its range and flexibility. But it almost entirely removed the obscurantism and mannerism of the “special dialect” that characterized the Eastern liturgical verse of the preceding five or six centuries. Yerushalmi has commented that it wasn’t just the biblical register that the medieval Hebrew poets adopted but a biblical mindset. This is demonstrated by the biblical typology of HaNagid, for example, who calls his enemy in Almeria by the biblical name “Agag” (1 Samuel 15:8) and refers to his Slavic army as “Amaleq.” See Yerushalmi, “Exile and Expulsion,” pp. 13–14. See HaNagid’s poem “The War with Yaddayir,” and *Selected Poems of Shmuel HaNagid*, trans. Peter Cole (Princeton, 1996), pp. xiii–xiv, 39–47, and 65–68; hereafter, Cole, *Selected HaNagid*. For a detailed discussion of biblical typology in this work, see Brann’s *Compunctious Poet*, pp. 23–58.

39. That is, the monorhymed Arabic ode, or *qasida*, along with the shorter lyric and epigrammatic fragment known as the *qita’*, would determine the contours of the Hebrew poem. Jewish life would flow through their lines, as the poets employed these forms for erotic, elegiac, didactic, epistolary, satirical, gnomic, and panegyric poetry, as well as for their most intimate prayers. In time, other forms (e.g. the *muwashshah* and additional strophic modes) would be added to the repertoire, drawn from the Arabic, Eastern Hebrew, and Romance traditions of Spain and Provence. Likewise, various changes in the meters were introduced, with, in some cases, syllabics, word-count, biblical-style cadenced verse, and other measures replacing the quantitative system. With regard to the relation between the quantitative meters and music, see Amnon Shiloah, “Development of Jewish Liturgical Singing in Spain,” in Beinart, *The Sephardic Legacy*, 2:426–27. For more detailed discussion of all the forms mentioned above, as well as of the genres and the rhetorical figures that the poets employed, see the glossary at the back of this volume.

40. See the introduction to Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, under the entry “Gentility, the Good, the Good Life,” pp. 26–27, and in particular the reference there to the canonical 1947 essay by Joseph Weiss, which reads in part: “Wherever a ‘court’ exists, there you will find ‘style’ . . . The pleasures of society, such as play, laughter, music, literature and of course the bonds of love and friendship, all pass through the crucible of subtle stylization until the social life of the court becomes entirely a game of art . . . poetry, song, entertaining rhymes and riddles, laughter, and light, cultured conversation.” The problem here is tonal as much as anything else.

In this respect, it is critical in reading medieval Hebrew poetry to have a sense of how the poetry of other courtly traditions has been treated in English translation and in modern scholarship. Shulamit Elitzur offers a balanced assessment of the situation: “Most of the important Hebrew poets active in Spain were financially and spiritually independent, and even if the stamp of court poetry is in various places impressed on their work, *they can by no means be defined as court poets* [italics mine]” (*Shirat HaHol*, p. 50). Moreover, a good deal of the encomia and occasional poetry that precipitated around the court involved poets writing to friends and fellow poets, rather than patrons. In other words, the poetry that evolved from the aristocratic background of Spanish-Muslim and Spanish-Jewish court society involved an elite element of the society, but it is an independent literature which, for the most part, is not dictated by the demands of any court or by financial considerations. (In this respect it is like much of the best medieval poetry from other cultures, including Japan and China.) See also Elitzur, *Shirat HaHol*, pp. 63–64. For more on this topic, see “encomia” in the glossary at the back of this volume.

41. Quoted in Frank Kermode’s introduction to *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. with an introduction by Frank Kermode (New York, 1975), p. 19. In many ways this is akin to poet and artist David Jones’s conception of art as an extra-utile and gratuitous act (*Anathemata* [London and Boston, 1952], pp. 23 and 29).

42. Abraham Ibn Daud, *Sefer Ha-Qabbalah: The Book of Tradition*, translation and notes by Gerson Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), especially pp. 276–77 and 286–87. The representation of “court poets” as prissy poetasters does, however, have its place in the literature, particularly later on. Qalonymos Ben Qalonymos (1286–after 1328) mocks poets he considered epigones as precisely the embodiment of that sort of effete figure—prancers and dancers on tiptoe and heel. See the biography preceding his poem in this anthology. The main point in Qalonymos’s portrait is that these deluded figures represent a plummet from the grace and sublime stature of the great poets of an earlier age. “The sons of elegance have passed away,” he writes, “the daughters of song are bowed, and only a carcass remains, unfit for an offering of man.” See Schirmann, *Toldot* (1997), pp. 529 and 539. This opposition to poetry was entirely new, and characteristic of later developments in Christian Spain. On the characterization of this period as a “renaissance,” see Joel Kramer, “The Culture Bearers of Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam,” Dr. Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature Annual Lecture, Tel Aviv University, 1984.

43. “The Jews of al-Andalus,” writes Raymond Scheindlin, “adopted the classicizing concept of *‘arabiyya*—the Arabic view of the preeminence of classical Arabic—but . . . made biblical Hebrew the equivalent of classical Arabic and accorded their language a new status as a cultural monument above and beyond its traditional status as the ‘holy tongue’” (“Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Iberia,” pp. 43–45). And Brann comments: “The stimulus for the poets’ linguistic ideology and literary practice came from the dynamic Arabo-Islamic host culture, yet their conscious objective was nationalistic. Golden Age Hebrew poetry . . . must

be seen, therefore, as literary discourse designed to mediate cultural ambiguity” (*Compunctious Poet*, p. 24). Throughout *The Compunctious Poet* Brann is alert to the way in which the often-contradictory concerns of the Jewish poets gave rise to “compunction,” which would manifest itself in a variety of modes. See also *Compunctious Poet*, pp. 69 and 88, and Ibn Ezra on the superiority of Arabic poetry (*The Book of Discussion*, pp. 29ff.), as well as Avraham Ibn Ezra’s “World Poetry,” below. Yehuda Alharizi also makes it clear that he composes his great work, *Tahkemoni*, in order to demonstrate Hebrew’s power (e.g., *Tahkemoni*, pp. 11–12, 22) and redeem the language from its fallen state, in which it had become the object of mockery and scorn. He states that he was driven to write the *Tahkemoni* by the example of that greatest of Arab authors, al-Hariiri, whom he himself had translated—also, in a sense, out of shame—though here he notes that al-Hariiri stole his material from Hebrew sources. The charge of “plagiarism” was of course false, but par for the contemporary course.

In his book on Hebrew poetics and literary history, Moshe Ibn Ezra also laments the fact that the richness of Hebrew had been lost long ago (when it was by no means inferior to Arabic), and that it was being rediscovered only in the new Hebrew poetry of Spain. He explains that the supremacy of the Sephardic poets is due to both their descent from illustrious Jerusalem families and their absorption of the sweetness of the Arabic poetry, which in turn derives from climatic and geographical circumstances (*The Book of Discussion*, pp. 28–31, 35, 43, and 54–55). Accounting for Sephardic supremacy, Alharizi expresses the common medieval belief in favorable geographical influence, which was based on the theories of Hippocrates. See *Tahkemoni*, p. 183, and *Eruvin* 53a, which enumerates the virtues of the Judean Jews as opposed to the Galilean Jews: “The Judeans, who cared for [the beauty of] their language, retained their learning, but the Galileans, who did not care for [the beauty of their language], did not retain their learning.” The passage goes on to mention “precision” as one of the other virtues that preserved the Judean tradition.

María Rosa Menocal describes Cordoba and the culture it stands for as “a first-rate place” in the sense of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s formula: “the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time.” “In its moments of great achievement,” Menocal writes, “medieval culture positively thrived on holding at least two, and often many more, contrary ideas at the same time” (*Ornament of the World*, pp. 10–11).

44. “He destroyed the holy tongue,/which is our remnant,/by casting Hebrew/in foreign meters”; “and he sought . . . to bring down his people with him” (*Teshuvot Talmidei Menahem Ibn Saruq*, facsimile ed. [Vienna, 1870], p. 7, lines 43–44; p. 20, lines 1–3. The response to Dunash was written by a student of Menahem, Yitzhaq Ibn Qapron, who composed his attack in one of the quantitative meters (in imitation of a poem by Dunash) in order to demonstrate that his opposition to them didn’t derive from the difficulty of writing in these new meters. Ibn Qapron added a good deal of fuel to the fire by inserting an ad

hominem dimension to the debate: he said that Dunash had clothed himself in spider webs, appealed to the young and ignorant, made himself a laughingstock every time he opened his mouth, and was driven by a desire for fame. In many ways the debate remains unresolved: to this day there is a good deal of disagreement over how this poetry should be recited, or sung, what much of it means, and—by extension—what the worth of it is.

On HaLevi's return to the debate, see his statements in *The Kuzari*, 2:63ff. and Schirmann's characterization of his position in *Toldot* (1995), pp. 443ff.

45. *Ta'ifa* means "party" or "faction" in Arabic. David Wasserstein comments that the increased opportunities that the rise of the decentralized *Ta'ifa* states brought about for Jews also resulted in increased exposure and risk. He points out that the Jewish cultural renaissance might be looked upon as part of the larger trend toward *shu'ubiyya*, "a form of national self-assertion, in cultural terms, by non-Arabs against Arab domination and Arab claims to superiority" (*The Rise and Fall of the Party Kings*, pp. 169, 181–83, 191–93, and 220). Arabic literature, too, saw something of a renaissance, as new poetic forms and modes were developed, especially the dialect- or vernacular-based *zajal*. Andalusian Arabic poetry experienced its golden age during this time (from the late tenth through the eleventh century). Some of the major poets of that period include Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, Ibn Darraaj al-Qastali, Ibn Shuhayd al-Andalusi, Ibn Hazm, and Ibn Zayduun. That tradition continued on through the period of Muslim presence in Spain and produced other major poets as well, such as the Sufi Muhyaddin Ibn al-'Arabi. For more on this work see Salma Khadra Jayyusi, "Andalusian Poetry: The Golden Age," in Jayyusi, *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, pp. 316–66. For effective selections of the poems in English translation, see *Andalusian Poems*, trans. Christopher Middleton and Leticia Garza-Falcón (Boston, 1992); also A. R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1946).

46. The appearance of these four major poets (to be followed by Avraham Ibn Ezra) in rapid succession in the eleventh and twelfth century was also described by Schirmann as partaking of the miraculous.

47. The Almoravids originally came to Spain at the request of the Spanish Muslims, who were unable to ward off the armies of the Christian Reconquest on their own. (Toledo had been retaken by the Christians in 1085). In time they turned against their Andalusian co-religionists, whom they regarded as excessively worldly, weak, and corrupt, and they attempted to spread their reductive doctrine through the region, imposing as well heavy taxation to fund their military efforts. The Jewish community suffered at the hands of both the Christian and the Berber forces. As Yehuda HaLevi wrote, in a poem beginning "Aqonon 'al mar tela'otay": "Between the hosts of Seir [the Christians] and Qedar [the Muslims], my host is lost. . . . They wage their wars and we fall when they fall—thus was it ever in Israel!" (in Yitzhak Baer, *The History of the Jews in Christian Spain* [Philadelphia, 1961/92], p. 70). The Almohads arrived on the scene in order

to reform what they considered to be the corrupt ways of the Almoravid rulers. Eventually the practice of any other religion except Islam was forbidden in Almohad Andalusia. The father of Maimonides, for example, fled Cordoba during the Almohad invasion and, after much wandering, settled his family in Fez in 1160. The family may have converted to Islam for a period of time, though this is by no means clear. See C. Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (New York, 1931), pp. 9–12; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 11:754. “Almoravid” in Arabic is *al-muraabit*, deriving from the word for the fortified monasteries (*ribaati*) where the warrior-monks of this sect were stationed, or with which they identified spiritually; the Almohads were the *al-muwahhidun*, those who profess the unity or Oneness (*wahda*) of God. See in Menocal et al., *The Literature of al-Andalus*, J. Dodds, “Spaces,” p. 9, and P. Heath, “Knowledge,” pp. 112–13, Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*, pp. 17–18; Ronald A. Messier, “North Africa, Islam and the Mediterranean World,” *Journal of North African Studies* 6/1 (Spring 2001): 65, 67, and 72–74; and *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, under “Almoravid” (P. Chalmers) and “Almohad” (M. Shatzmiller).

48. The dissemination of (and hunger for) Arabic learning went on, Scheindlin notes, even as the creators of that culture were being subjugated (“Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Iberia,” pp. 51–52).

49. One writer has described these events as “the Spanish equivalent of Kristallnacht” (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, commentary in *Covenant and Conversation*, August 26, 2005, reprinted in *Sephardic Heritage Update*, ed. David Shasha no. 175 [September 21, 2005]). For more details of the events of 1391, see the biographical introduction and notes to Shelomo DePiera’s poems.

50. Raymond Scheindlin divides the five centuries of composition into three (rather than two) periods: the period of Arabic ambience (c. 900–c. 1150); a transitional period (c. 1100–c. 1300); and “a period when most Jewish literary figures inhabited a Christian ambience” (c. 1250–1492) (“Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Iberia,” pp. 39–40, 50, and 53). As Hebrew poetry moved into Christian Spain it entered what he calls “a period of literary experimentation stimulated by new cultural circumstances.” Elsewhere Scheindlin notes how the Hebrew writers of the fifteenth century seemed to be working toward a new synthesis of Hebrew and Romance culture, though that synthesis was, for a number of reasons, never fully realized. The characterization of the later poetry as “epigonic” is reflected in remarks by Schirmann (*HaShira*, 4:530) and others. Dan Pagis comments on the way in which scholars and ordinary readers have mistakenly read the period’s poetry as though it were all cut from a single cloth. In doing so, they have failed to appreciate its variety and the essential nature of the change that came with the later work (*Hiddush uMasoret beShirat haHol* [Jerusalem, 1976], pp. 1–2 and 180). See also Scheindlin, “Secular Hebrew Poetry in Fifteenth-Century Spain,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World: 1391–1648*, p. 34.

51. In this pre-print society, poems were also memorized and disseminated through an oral tradition, albeit to a lesser extent. Numerous texts illustrate the value placed on this poetry and the manner in which it circulated. In a damaged

and not altogether decipherable late eleventh- or early twelfth-century Arabic letter retrieved from the Cairo Geniza, we find a Palestinian Jew named 'Ali writing somewhat frantically to his friend, the cantor of the Egyptian port city of Damietta, quoting Arabic proverbs, passages from the Bible, rabbinic sayings, and contemporary poetry as he asks him to send on a list of items, in particular articles of clothing, which he'd left in Damietta. "I also need," he tells him, "[the collection of] Ibn Khalfoun's poems. Either send it on and I will copy it, or have it copied for me. I beg of you!! For someone borrowed the [ . . . ] from me . . . and then was embarrassed to return it and took it with him to Yemen. Please do not forget under any circumstances to do this for me" (S. D. Goitein, "LeQorot Shirato shel Yitzhaq Ibn Khalfoun," *Tarbiz* 29 [1960]: 357–58).

Likewise, Ammiel Alcalay in his *After Arabs and Jews*, which extends this poetry's links beyond the medieval world of the Geniza and into the living legacy of a modern and contemporary Levantine sensibility and community, finds in the maze of Goitein's Geniza documents an eleventh- or twelfth-century estate agent's inventory of a Spanish-Jewish coppersmith's belongings, which lists—in addition to the tools of his trade and his clothes—a small chest containing two prayer books (including the one compiled by Sa'adia Gaon), part of the Book of Psalms, and "a book of poetry in Arabic characters." The latter, Goitein comments, reflects "the infatuation of Spanish Jews with Arabic poetry," and the prayer books, as Alcalay puts it, serve "the double function of ritual guide and [liturgical] poetry anthology" (Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 4:338; Alcalay, *After Arabs and Jews: Remaking Levantine Culture* [Minneapolis and London, 1993], pp. 142ff.). Goitein also comments elsewhere on the impressive level of learning displayed by the letters of middle-class Jews in the Geniza documents (in Alcalay, pp. 151–52; Goitein, 2:195).

Finally, Dan Pagis notes that Moshe Ibn Ezra, at the end of his chapter on the Spanish-Hebrew supremacy in poetry (*Book of Discussion*, p. 87), explains that he hasn't quoted from the master poets and their choice pearls because these were already "famous and constantly recited by the *rawis*"—or, "regularly in the mouths of the reciters of poetry" (Pagis, *Hiddush uMasoret*, p. 43). For Ibn Ezra's comments on the dissemination of HaNagid's work from Spain to Babylonia, see the biographical introduction to HaNagid's work in what follows.

See also "diwan" in the glossary.

52. In time some of the poetry would make its way to India, and in one case even to Hong Kong. With regard to the often-astonishing recovery and reconstruction of the poetry from the Cairo Geniza and other sites in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and most recently from the archives of the St. Petersburg Library, see Goitein's *Mediterranean Society*, 1:1–6; Stefan C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Cairo: The History of Cambridge University's Genizah Collection* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–22; Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 3–13; A. M. Habermann, *HaGeniza veHaGenizot* (Jerusalem, 1971); and especially, Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 2d ser. (Philadelphia, 1908), pp. 1–30, which offers a vivid

account of his experience in Cairo and a marvelous description of what he found there:

It is a battlefield of books, and the literary productions of many centuries had their share in the battle, and their *disjecta membra* are now strewn over its area. Some of the belligerents have perished outright, and are literally ground to dust in the terrible struggle for space, whilst others, as if overtaken by a general crush, are squeezed into big unshapely lumps, which even with the aid of chemical appliances can no longer be separated without serious damage to their constituents. In their present condition these lumps sometimes afford curiously suggestive combinations; as, for instance, when you find a piece of some rationalistic work, in which the very existence of either angels or devils is denied, clinging for its very life to an amulet in which these same beings (mostly the latter) are bound over to be on their good behavior and not interfere with Miss Jair's love for somebody. The development of the romance is obscured by the fact that the last lines of the amulet are mounted on some I.O.U., or lease, and this in turn is squeezed between the sheets of an old moralist, who treats all attention to monetary affairs with scorn and indignation. . . . All these contradictory matters cleave tightly to some sheets from a very old Bible. This, indeed, ought to be the last umpire between them, but it is hardly legible without peeling off from its surface the fragments of some printed work, which clings to old nobility with all the obstinacy and obtrusiveness of the *parvenu*. ("A Hoard of Hebrew Manuscripts," in *Studies in Judaism*, pp. 6-7.)

For the story surrounding the recovery of the manuscript that came to be known as "Schocken 37," which was, at the very last moment, saved from the flames and found to contain some four thousand poems by most of the period's major poets along with work by a host of lesser-known writers, see Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, "Deaths, Diwans, Detectives," pp. 9-11. The tale of HaNagid's retrieval from oblivion is sketched in my *Selected HaNagid*, pp. xiv-xv. In certain instances—HaNagid is one—the twentieth-century discovery brings about an Emily Dickinson-like entry of a poet from an older era into the mix of the evolving modern literature (though in this case the eras are nearly a millennium apart). The late Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, who as an undergraduate studied with Haim Schirmann, often spoke of Shmu'el HaNagid as his favorite poet; and the first great modern Hebrew poet, Haim Nahman Bialik, devoted a good deal of his life to the "ingathering" of the medieval Hebrew poetry. Likewise poet Leah Goldberg's connection to the poetry was strong. The history of the retrieval of this work is, in other words, at times as fascinating as the work itself.

53. While less common, the cases in which poets translated individual poems are also instructive, as the Hebrew writers often transformed them in telling ways. Yehuda HaLevi has two marvelous instances of translation from heteroeroticism to homoeroticism and profane to sacred (in this volume, "That Day while I Had

Him” and “Love’s Dwelling”). Shmu’el HaNagid’s virtuoso improvisation on a bowl of apples begins with an impromptu translation of Arabic lines (see Cole, *Selected HaNagid*, pp. 12–13, and in this anthology, “The Apple”). Meir HaLevi Abulafia, a major religious figure from Toledo, has one of the few Hebrew translations from an Andalusian (rather than Abbasid) Arabic poem—“Fighting Time”—and of course Alharizi’s *Iti’el* (below) involves the translation or adaptation, of numerous individual poems as well as many passages of prose. A number of the later Hebrew poets also wrote in Spanish, with one of them—Shem Tov Arduziel, a.k.a. Santob de Carrión—becoming an important writer in the Spanish literary canon.

All the Hebrew poets of Muslim Spain wrote their prose in Judeo-Arabic or in Arabic proper. Some also wrote poems in Arabic, and at least one—Ibrahim Ibn Sahl (d. 1259/60), who seems to have converted to Islam early in his life—became an important Arab poet. His diwan is “one of the finest specimens of Andalusian poetry” (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 3). See also Qasmuna bint Isma’il in the note to The Wife of Dunash’s “Will Her Love Remember?” (below).

54. The family was from Granada and then moved to southern France. According to Assis, this “one Andalusian family . . . changed the outlook and the character of . . . Provence. . . . Four generations of translators and scholars provided Provencal Jewry and in a sense the whole of Europe with [an entire] library of books on Jewish philosophy and books of arithmetic, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy, medicine, general philosophy, and other branches of science and thought” (“Sefarad,” p. 33).

55. Schirmann, *Toldot* (1997), pp. 148–53 and 180–84.

56. *Toldot*, (1997), pp. 146–53 and 177–84; and Matti Huss, “HaMagid be-Maqamot HaQlasi’ot—leVeiruro shel Munah,” *Tarbiz* 65/1 (1996): 164–72. Elsewhere in the world of translation at the time, Alharizi’s method was known as *sensus de sensu* (or *ad sensum*, according to sense); Ibn Tibbon’s method was referred to as *verbum et verba* (or *ad verbum*, according to the word, i.e., literally). What is unusual here is that Alharizi chooses a method (*sensus de sensu*) that is usually associated with societies in which the “target language” is dominant. As Huss points out (“HaMagid,” pp. 170–71), Ibn Tibbon saw Hebrew as inferior to Arabic, at least with regard to its capacity to absorb philosophical discourse. Alharizi, on the other hand, made it clear elsewhere in his work (*Tahkemoni*, pp. 12, 21) that he considered Hebrew superior (though it was not culturally dominant at the time).

57. Not unlike the young Nabokov translating *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian and replacing Carroll’s French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror, with one that Napoleon left behind him in Russia. See Wyatt Mason, “Swann’s Ways,” *New Republic*, January 12, 2005.

58. Moshe Ibn Ezra, *The Book of Discussion*, p. 177.

59. Moshe Ibn Ezra, *The Book of Discussion*, p. 143. “For by the ear will the work be tested, and the ears are the gates to the mind.” He also quotes an Arab

poet: “Poetic meter [or cadence] is something natural, found in the senses [in a sense for it]” (p. 137).

60. Weinberger is one of our finest writers on, among other things, the art and importance of translation. His comments appear in “Mislaidd in Translation” (*Written Reaction: Poetics, Politics, Polemics* [New York, 1996], p. 166). An expanded and updated version of that essay appears in *Fascicle 1* (2005), at <http://fascicle.com/issue01>. The best discussion of the problem of employing quantitative meters in English is by John Hollander. See “Observations in the Art of English Quantity,” in *Vision and Romance* (New York, 1975), pp. 59–70. Also Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York, 1965/79), pp. 68–69.

61. Again, medieval Hebrew poetry, as Pagis notes, has long been treated by scholars as “a collective accomplishment rather than a variety of distinctly individual achievements.” While the poets shared, as it were, a single toolbox and set of materials, and while it is critical to become familiar with the tools contained in that box and the materials with which the poets worked, it is just as important to learn to differentiate between their various ways of employing those tools and molding their material. In fact, the work they produced with that equipment is remarkably varied and expressive. Pagis’s revisionist statement is perhaps the most eloquent articulation of the situation: “I now believe,” he writes, with characteristic modesty and reconsidering a long and distinguished career during which he held to a somewhat different view, “that the Hebrew-Spanish school as a whole allowed much more room for individuality than is generally supposed, and that modern scholars have been sometimes more conventional in their views than medieval poets were in their work” (*Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* [Berkeley, 1991], pp. 6–23).

62. For a fuller treatment of the challenges facing the translator of medieval Hebrew Poetry, see Peter Cole, “Real Gazelles in Imaginary Gardens: Art, Scholarship, and the Translation of Medieval Hebrew Poetry from Spain,” *Yale Review*, Winter 2007.

63. *The Ruba‘iyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs (London, 1979/81), pp. 42–43.

64. T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry/The Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 24.

65. One could dwell for the length and depth of a long career on this form/content controversy. A person who has done just that is Jaroslav Stetkevych, one of the leading scholars of medieval Arabic literature, who says: “Instead of looking for signs of dichotomy of form and content, one could, with equal ease, reverse the lens and see in Arabic poetry the closest possible—or the will to the closest possible—marriage between form and content, precisely because the poetry is so highly formalistic. . . . Poetic content not only survives [there] but flourishes, albeit in unaccustomed ways, [extracting] out of [its] predicament a strange power and solidity of imaginative impact” (*Zephyrs of Najd* [Chicago and London, 1993], pp. 4–5).

66. In particular, the parallel with the Islamic arts is instructive. The central role of ornament in the visual arts sheds considerable light on the use of the rhetorical figures, or poetic ornaments, taken over to Hebrew verse from Arabic. I have written about this aspect of the poetry in *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 11–13, and *Selected HaNagid*, pp. xix and xxii. See also Julie Meisami, *Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 315–17, and Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 24–27 and *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven and London, 1973/87), especially “The Idea of the Arabesque,” pp. 178ff.

67. Ezra Pound, *Translations* (New York, 1963), p. 24.

68. See Cole, *Selected HaNagid*, pp. xxi–xxiv and *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 11–13, 16–18, 22–30, 35 and 37; also Weinberger, *Written Reaction*, pp. 164–65, and *Outside Stories* (New York, 1992), pp. 59–61.

69. This applies both on the level of line-by-line readings and with regard to the poems as a whole. That is, if I have included a poem in this volume, I have generally translated all of it—or at least self-standing sections of a composite work—in order to demonstrate how the parts of the poem come together (or don’t). In a few instances, however—especially where long poems are involved—I have made do with excerpts, in which case the notes explain precisely what has been taken from what. Excerpting of this sort was, as it happens, a common practice in medieval Arabic anthologies. See “epigram” in the glossary.

70. Schorsch (“The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy”) and Jane Gerber (“Towards an Understanding of the Term ‘Golden Age’ as an Historical Reality,” in *The Heritage of the Jews of Spain* [Tel Aviv, 1995]) discuss the ways in which the political motives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German-Jewish scholars distorted their portraits of the period. Distortion of another sort is examined by María Rosa Menocal in *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (Philadelphia, 1987). In *Under Crescent and Cross* Mark Cohen discusses the “myth of an interfaith utopia” as well as Muslim outbursts of violence against the Jews (pp. 3–14 and 163ff.). He also places the term “tolerance” in context, noting that “tolerance, at least as we in the West have understood it since John Locke, did not [in the Middle Ages] constitute a virtue. . . . Monotheistic religions in power throughout history have felt it proper, if not obligatory, to persecute nonconforming religions. . . . When all is said and done, however, the historical evidence indicates that the Jews of Islam, especially during the formative and classical centuries (up to the thirteenth century), experienced much less persecution than did the Jews of Christendom” (p. xix). Scheindlin, in “Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Iberia” (pp. 49–50), notes that little mention of Jewish cultural activity is made in Muslim sources. That said, as another writer put it, “the question of cross-fertilization of cultures, of a *convivencia* of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, is not merely a modern-day fashion. It is indeed the central issue in the history of al-Andalus, for its political fortunes rose and fell in relationship to its ability to minimize ethnic factionalism and forge a spirit of common enterprise” (L. Alvarez, “Spain,” in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, p. 729). A detailed comparative study of the way in

which relations between Jews and Muslims fluctuated between tolerance and hostility—and how that is reflected in the poetry and the literature that surrounds it—is offered by Brann in his *Power in the Portrayal* (Princeton, 2002). See also David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 3–10 and 245–46, and “What Can Medieval Spain Teach Us About Muslim–Jewish Relations?” *CCAR Journal* (Spring/Summer 2002), pp. 17–36; Alex Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Spain: An Historiographical Enigma,” *Medieval Encounters* 11/1–2 (2005): 7–36; and “convivencia,” in the glossary.

71. The “neo-lachrymose” school of historians. See Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 9–11. Also Assis, “Sefarad,” p. 34, and N. Stillman, “Myth, Countermyth, and Distortion,” (*Tikkun*, vols. 6:3–4, 1991).

72. Darwish’s comments are from an interview he gave to *Hadarim* (no. 12), a prominent Israeli literary journal in 1996, in Amman. The journal’s editor, Helit Yeshurun, had asked Darwish about the meaning of al-Andalus for him, since the term figures prominently in his work in several places. As for Darwish and his dream, the cultural vision at its heart is—notwithstanding the changes brought about by recent events—shared by at least a few. The Syrian poet Adonis (‘Ali Ahmad Sa‘id) recently wrote: “Andalusia was in human and cultural terms . . . a mosaic of different yet harmonious elements, numerous yet one. It was a sort of hybridization of the world in form as well as in essence. In everything Andalusia produced, whether philosophical, scientific, or artistic, three horizons converged, Jewish, Christian, in addition to the foundational horizon, the Arabic-Islamic constituent. It therefore transcended all that was bounded by a language or by a particular national or cultural affiliation. . . . It was the homeland of the self and the Other. As such, it was the originator of the avant-gardist idea of stripping the concept of the homeland of boundedness and constructing it in the space of freedom. . . . Thus, in the light of the Andalusian nucleus, we can see how a culture with intertwining borders and languages, a culture that transcends politics and geographic-national boundaries, might emerge in today’s world. It is a culture of hybridization, a culture that finds its identity in diversity, a culture in which Otherness is an organic and constituent dimension. Thus Andalusia seems a viable project, not only for the present, but also for the future” (lecture at Dartmouth College, 2002).

73. “It is dawn at Jerusalem while midnight hovers above the Pillars of Hercules. All ages are contemporaneous” (Ezra Pound, “Praefatio Ad Lectorem Electum, 1910,” in *The Spirit of Romance* [New York, 1952], p. 6); “There is no earlier and later in the Torah” (*Pesahim* 6b). This is not to say that one shouldn’t account for the differences between the medieval world and our own; one should. At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the dimensions of experience that are shared across time. The fact is that poets themselves live the contemporaneity of all ages, as do readers who turn to poetry for nourishment, for what poems can tell them about being alive. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi writes at eloquent length about the ways in which this non-chronological dimension finds

expression in the Jewish historical imagination: “Unlike the biblical writers the rabbis seem to play with Time as though with an accordion, expanding and collapsing it at will. . . . In the world of *aggada* Adam can instruct his son Seth in the Torah, Shem and Eber establish a house of study, the patriarchs institute the three daily prayer-services of the normative Jewish liturgy, Og King of Bashan is present at Isaac’s circumcision, and Noah prophesies the translation of the Bible into Greek. . . . There is something rather compelling about that large portion of the rabbinic universe in which ordinary barriers of time can be ignored and all the ages placed in an ever-fluid dialogue with one another” (*Zakhor* [Seattle and London, 1982], p. 17; see also pp. 31–52).

74. Yom Tov Assis writes that Spanish-Hebrew poetry introduces us to this society. Considering its sexual mores, he notes the gap that existed between reality and theory in Muslim and Christian communities—the influence of which Jews were exposed to: “On both sides of the ever-changing border in the Iberian peninsula, [Spanish Jews] were more deeply involved in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the land than was any other mediaeval Jewish community.” As a result, he says, “[Hispano-Jewish society], torn between extreme and contradictory trends, found itself characterized by sexual laxity to an extent unknown elsewhere in mediaeval Jewry” (“Sexual Behaviour in Mediaeval Hispano-Jewish Society,” in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein [London, 1988], p. 27).

75. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, “Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism: The Iberian and the German Models,” Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture 26 (New York, 1982), p. 8; Daniel Elazar, *The Other Jews: Sephardim Today* (New York, 1989), p. 45. Jane Gerber cites the figure of 90 percent and notes that they were “an absolute majority in medieval times. . . . By the twentieth century, an absolute reversal had occurred: in 1930 Sephardim were less than 10 percent of world Jewry” (*The Jews of Spain*, p. xxiv). At the time of the Expulsion, which was signed on March 31, 1492, and gave Jews until the end of July to convert or leave the kingdom, the Jewish community had been greatly reduced through conversion, emigration, and slaughter. Reliable numbers are, once again, hard to come by, and estimations offered by scholars range from some eighty thousand to triple that (with the former more likely). Many of the remaining Jews—perhaps more than half—chose conversion over emigration. The last Jews left Spanish soil on July 31, or the seventh of the Hebrew month of Av; because it fell so close to the day marking the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the Expulsion itself was added by Jewish tradition to the commemoration of those catastrophic events in Jewish history. For a description and analysis of the Expulsion and the events that led to it, see H. Beinart, “Order of the Expulsion from Spain: Antecedents, Causes, and Textual Analysis,” in *Crisis and Creativity*, pp. 79–94. See also Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*, p. 140, and H. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: An Historical Revision* (London, 1997), pp. 23–24.

## ‡ NOTES TO THE POEMS ‡

THESE NOTES contain the following items: (1) the poet's name; (2) comments referring to the biographical notes; (3) the English title of the poem—which I have added, as the Hebrew poems have no titles; (4) the poem's provenance (print volumes of the poet's work are listed first, and then, for convenience, the citation from Haim Schirmann's four-volume *HaShira HaIvrit biSefarad uveProvans*, 2d ed. [Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1959], hereafter *HaShira*, if in fact the poem was included in that anthology); (5) comments on the poem, treating formal elements, copyists' headings (where they are of interest), biblical citations, allusions, as well as other textual and cultural background. The "neutral *shibbutzim*" (on which, see the glossary at the end of this volume) are listed in abbreviated fashion and do not generally have implications for the meaning of the poem that would warrant the wearying process of looking up each citation. I offer the abbreviated listings here, erring perhaps on the side of excess, in order to concretize the reader's sense of the biblical substratum of the work. In some cases, these neutral *shibbutzim* are listed in full, particularly when they occur in key positions in the poem (such as the end) or when, for any number of reasons, they might be of interest to the English reader. Unless otherwise noted, all the poems below are, in the original Hebrew, monorhymed and written in the quantitative meters adapted from Arabic poetry. Other forms—such as the *muwashshah* and other strophic patterns—are generally indicated. For an explanation of these forms and the various genres they involve, see the glossary. Most biblical citations are from the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) version of 1929. The new JPS version (NJPS) is occasionally cited as well. Square brackets in the translations indicate that the manuscript is corrupt. At times guesses have been hazarded by scholars in order to fill in the missing material, in which case the translation follows suit. If the missing material has not been reconstructed, ellipses are inserted between the brackets. In the longer poems, ellipses without brackets generally indicate that I have omitted material. Details of these excerpts are always mentioned in the notes; if the notes do not mention the omission, the ellipses constitute punctuation.

### MUSLIM SPAIN

#### DUNASH BEN LABRAT

Moshe Ibn Ezra states that Dunash was born in Baghdad and educated in Fez. Sa'adia Gaon's comments were reported by Dunash himself, who of course considered them high praise. The characterizations of Dunash's manner and tempera-

ment are Schirmann's, based on *Teshuvot Talmidei Menahem Ibn Saruq*, facsimile ed. (Vienna, 1870), part 1, p. 29, where the students of his rival, Menahem, describe him as haughty and full of contempt for the local (Cordovan) culture.

## FRAGMENT

*Dunash Ben Labrat: Shirim*, ed. N. Allony (Jerusalem, 1947), p. 93; *Teshuvot Yehudi Ibn Sheshet*, ed. S. G. Stern (Vienna, 1870), p. 37. This fragment has survived as Dunash's intellectual credo; his attempt to blend Hebrew sources with Arabic forms was, as the biographical note suggests, more fully realized by subsequent poets.

## BLESSING FOR A WEDDING

*Shirim*, p. 60. Most likely composed as a *piyyut* to the priestly blessing, this short hymn in time came to serve as an extension of the grace after meals at weddings. **Lines 3–4:** Isaiah 35:6. **5–6:** Psalms 23:3; Genesis 24:27. **7–8:** Numbers 6:22–27. Aaron's blessing reads: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; The Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." Schirmann (*Toldot* [1995], pp. 127–28) notes that Dunash was characteristically daring here, composing several short religious hymns (including the now-popular "Dror Yiqra," which is not translated) in the new meter as well, even though introducing them into the arena of the sacred was bound to prove far more controversial and revolutionary than the introduction of Arabic elements into the secular literary realm.

## DRINK, HE SAID

*Shirim*, p. 64; *HaShira*, #4. In several respects one can say that medieval Hebrew secular poetry in Spain begins with the wine poem, since the first well-known poem in the canon of the new, Arabic-inspired quantitative verse is this one by Dunash. The invented patron (or courtier) of his poem extends an invitation (to a garden party) that continues for some fifteen lines before it is interrupted by the "I" of the poem, possibly Dunash himself—though the characterizations here appear to be ambiguous by design. Schirmann suggests that, for someone who is setting up a rejection of what he sees, Dunash seems to be enjoying his description of the party and its pleasures a great deal. Fleischer states plainly that the poem confronts the libertine court of Hasdai with the conservative social mores of the Babylonian-trained Dunash, who is represented in the poem by the shocked interlocutor. Although the poem expresses the ambivalent feelings that a poet like Dunash may have had, the device of the interlocutor is also common in Arabic poetry, so that in some respects even the "compunction" here might be conventional. At any rate, and in conflict, this is where it all begins. It is interesting in this regard to note—as Raymond Scheindlin does—that the medieval

copyist who preserved the poem assumed in the heading he composed for it that the poem's central subject was in fact the pleasures of the party and its atmosphere and not the compunction of the second speaker (*Wine, Women, and Death* [Philadelphia, 1986], pp. 43–44). Scheindlin also comments that the meter of this poem “represents an experimental stage in the adaptation of Arabic prosody to Hebrew,” and may have sounded somewhat mechanical to listeners who were accustomed to hearing accomplished and flowing Arabic verse (*Wine, Women, and Death*, p. 45). The Hebrew rhymes *aaab*, *cccb*, *dddb*, etc.; while the translation echoes that scheme in places, it highlights instead the rhythmic and aural emphases of the original. **Heading:** “Another poem by Dunash of blessed memory, about drinking at evening and dawn . . . accompanied by musical instruments, the sound of water courses and strings, and the birds chirping from the branches, with the scent of all sorts of herbs—all this he described at a party by Hasdai, may he rest in peace.” **Lines 1–4:** Parties of this sort were often held just before dawn. Aloe here is the tall aromatic Indian tree (Song of Songs 4:14), not the succulent houseplant. **9:** Psalms 42:8, though here it refers to the channels of water and fountains in the garden. **12:** Psalms 150:4. **15–16:** Ezekiel 17:23. **20:** Jeremiah 48:36. **26:** Amos 6:6. **28:** Judges 5:25. **33:** 2 Kings 20:13. **35:** Isaiah 28:2. **36–40:** *Baba Batra* 60b: “Since the day of the destruction of the Temple we should by rights bind ourselves not to eat meat nor drink wine.” **39:** Lamentations 2:1. **40:** Jerusalem was, at the time, held by the Muslims. **44:** Ecclesiastes 4:5, 2:14; Proverbs 19:25. **45–46:** Psalms 19:16.

## THE WIFE OF DUNASH

### WILL HER LOVE REMEMBER?

E. Fleischer, “‘Al Dunash Ben Labrat veIshto uVeno,” *Mehqerei Yerushalayim be-Sifrut Ivrit* 5 (1984): 196. See also Fleischer, “LeToldot Shirat HaHol Ha’Ivrit biSefarad beReshitah,” in *Asufot/Tarbut veHevrah beToldot Yisrael beYamei HaBenayim*, ed. M. Ben-Sasson et al. (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 205–6 and 216–18. Women poets hold a place of esteem in medieval Arabic literature and numerous women poets are prominent in the Christian tradition, but the wife of Dunash is the only Hebrew woman poet we know of from the Middle Ages. Moreover, as Tova Rosen points out, “not only is she the first identifiable woman poet in the Hebrew language since the biblical poetesses Miriam and Deborah, she is also the only one for centuries to come” (*Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature* [Philadelphia, 2003], p. 2). Goitein explains the near-total absence of woman in the Spanish-Hebrew literary context by noting that the composition of poetry as the Andalusian Jews understood it required extensive knowledge of Scripture, as well as familiarity with rabbinic literature. Men spent their entire childhood studying such texts, which were reinforced by worship and ongoing study. Most

woman were illiterate, and—for the most part—even educated women (for whom, like the men, Arabic was their spoken mother tongue) would not have been exposed to Scripture in the manner necessary for the composition of Hebrew verse. Still, upper-class Jewish women, at least, would have received a serious education, and the Geniza records indicate that there were exceptional women who were teachers and copyists. In the Arabic context, a daughter's relationship with her father was, as Shirley Guthrie points out, "crucial to her future in society, since his views of women in the wider world, their education, his assessment of her suitability and worth and so on would be honed from early childhood" (*Arab Women in the Middle Ages* [London, 2001], p. 175). When it came to poetry by Jewish women, apart from Dunash's wife, only Qasmuna bint Isma'il al-Yehudi is reported to have written poems, though in Arabic:

ON SEEING HERSELF IN THE MIRROR

I see an orchard where  
 the time has come for harvesting,  
 but see no gardener  
 reaching out a hand . . .  
 Youth passes, vanishing—  
 and there remains,  
 alone,  
 one I will not name.

AH, GAZELLE

always grazing  
 here in this garden—  
 I'm dark-eyed just  
 like you, and lonely.  
 We both live far  
 from friends, forsaken—  
 patiently bearing  
 our fate's decree.

Several scholars have identified the author of these Sappho-like lyrics as the daughter of the great Hebrew poet Shmu'el HaNagid (who was known in Arabic as Isma'il Ibn Naghrela). For more on her and the problem of identification, see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (Berkeley, 1969–88) 5:468–69, 2:183–85, and 3:321–22; J. Nichols, "The Arabic Verses of Qasmuna bint Isma'il," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13 (1981): 155–58; James Bellamy, "Qasmuna the Poetess: Who Was She?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 423–24; David Wasserstein, "Samuel Ibn Naghrila ha-Nagid and Islamic Historiography in al-Andalus," *al-Qantara* 14 (1993): 109–25; M. A. Gallego, *Miscellanea de estudios Arabica y Hebraica* 48 (1999): 63–75; and Abdullah al-Udhari, *Classical Poems by Arab*

*Women* (London, 1999), pp. 178–80. **Line 1:** Proverbs 5:19. **2:** Fleischer notes that the involvement of a young child in the tableaux of the poem is extremely unusual in the medieval Hebrew context, where children are mentioned only when they are born and when they die (“LeToldot Shirat HaHol,” p. 217). **3–4:** Song of Songs 8:6. The bracelet around the upper arm was worn as a sign of strength and dignity. **6:** Men sometimes wore the outer garments of their wives. Song of Songs 5:7; Song of Songs 8:6–7. **7:** *Eretz Sefarad*. **8:** Esther 5:3. According to Goitein the final lines, which he acknowledges are confusing, should read: “Will there remain in the entire land of Spain its lord Dunash, even if he takes one half of the kingdom with him?” (Literally, “one half of the prince’s [*nagid*’s] kingdom with him.) *Nagid* in this context would have referred to Hasdai, and been a general title. My translation follows Fleischer’s explication. It isn’t clear why his wife couldn’t have joined Dunash in exile, but judging from the tone and content of the poem, that was out of the question. She may have been bound to her family in Spain, or Dunash may have had to flee at once.

Part of Dunash’s far less impressive (though tender) reply is extant as well. He begins by quoting what appears to have been either another poem sent on by his wife’s relatives, or a letter by them or by Dunash’s wife: “Were you seeking the day of my death when you wrote: / ‘Have you betrayed and abandoned your vows?’ / Could I ever betray a woman as wise as you are, / given to me by the Lord from youth? / If my heart had ever thought to leave you / I would have torn it into pieces. / For those who betray their beloved companion, / God brings down with the trials of foes. / Lions soon will devour his flesh, / and eagles suck up his blood. / Who resembles the stars of dawn. . . .” The poem is cut off at this point in the manuscript. Fleischer writes: “The pathos and garrulousness of this fragment are very much in line with what we know from his other poems, and they are, it needs to be said, the opposite of what we find in the poem attributed to his wife.” Fleischer goes on to note the “professional” nature of Dunash’s response, moving from the particular to the general. It is entirely possible, he adds, that Dunash returned to Spain at some point. (See Fleischer, “‘Al Dunash velshto,” pp. 199–200.) A still more recent discovery arising from the documents found in the Geniza (and possibly from Hasdai’s archive) confirms that in fact Dunash did “betray and abandon” his vows. In the upper-left corner of what appears to be a poem of complaint by Dunash addressed to Hasdai, after their break, Fleischer has noted the following lines: “Grapes I will not glean, and I will not gather the corn. / I’ve betrayed a young wife and sent her a writ of divorce. / I’ve abandoned my home and left the son she bore.” In the preceding lines Dunash complains, says Fleischer, of the conditions of his service under Hasdai, of the pressures he faced in that job, and of the heavy price he had to pay for it in the end: the destruction of his family (“LeToldot Shirat HaHol,” p. 218).

## YITZHAQ IBN MAR SHA'UL

Ibn Mar Sha'ul is primarily known for his liturgical verse, including the famous poem of petition that begins "Lord, do not judge me for my sins" (not translated here). Among his most distinguished students at the Lucena academy was Yona Marwaan Ibn Janaah, the great linguist.

## A FAWN SOUGHT IN SPAIN

*Shirim Hadashim min HaGeniza*, ed. Haim Schirmann (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 157–58; Ezra Fleischer, "Hadashot beYitzirato shel R. Yitzhak Bar Levi (Ibn Mar Sha'ul)," in *Mehqerei Lashon Mugeshet leZe'ev Ben-Haim*, ed. M. Bar Asher, A. Dotan, D. Tenna, and D. Ben 'Ami (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 450. For more on the figure of the *tzvi*, and on erotic and homoerotic poetry generally, see the glossary at the back of this volume under "gazelle" and "desire, poems of." On homoeroticism in medieval Arab society, see also James Bellamy, "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot (Malibu, 1979), 23–42; J. W. Wright and Everett Rowson, *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, 1997); and John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, pp. 194ff. On homoeroticism in Jewish society, see Jefim Schirmann, "The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Sefarad* 15 (1955): 55–68; S. D. Goitein, "The Sexual Mores of the Common People," in Lufti, *Society and the Sexes*; Yom Tov Assis, "Sexual Behaviour in Mediaeval Hispano-Jewish Society"; Norman Roth, "Deal Gently with the Young Man: Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain," *Speculum* 57 (1982): 20–51; and, in Hebrew, articles by Matti Huss and Yosef Na'eh (cited in the notes to Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra's "Over His Boy," and Alharizi's "On Zion's Holy Hill," respectively). **Line 1:** The poet uses the term "Espamyā"—which was common up until the time of Shmu'el HaNagid. **2:** Jeremiah 32:19. **7–8:** Song of Songs 7:6. **9:** Genesis 39:6. **10:** Adonijah here probably comes instead of Absalom, who was noted for his long hair; the substitution in the Hebrew maintains the meter. **11–12:** 1 Samuel 16:12. **20:** Isaiah 28:7. **21–22:** Part of this line is corrupt. The other part was copied incorrectly in the manuscript found in the Cairo Geniza and printed as such by Schirmann (it repeated previous lines from the poem). In 1983, Fleischer published an article (above) on new findings relating to Ibn Mar Sha'ul's work, including another copy of the poem that contained what appears to be the correct wording. **27–28:** Psalms 55:24; and Psalms 86:13, where "nethermost pit" and sheol (or netherworld) are identified. The lines might also read, literally: "Raise me from this grave, lest I fall into Hell."

## YOSEF IBN AVITOR

“Avitor”—Arabic for “father of the ox”—was an epithet; the family name Ibn Shatnas, or al-Shatnas (some say Satnas), seems to be Spanish in origin. In the controversy around the directorship of the academy, Ibn Avitor sought to displace his former teacher’s son (Hanokh Ben Moshe). For the caliph’s comment, see Ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition*, trans. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), p. 67.

## LAMENT FOR THE JEWS OF ZION

*HaShira*, #12. This *qina*, or elegy, the first Spanish-Hebrew poem of its kind relating to specific historical circumstances, is considered to be among Ibn Avitor’s finest works. It is one of the few poems of his written in the Arabic-influenced meter introduced by Dunash. (Another follows below.) Fleischer notes that this is clearly a very late poem for Ibn Avitor—written after the disturbances in Palestine of 1024, during which Jews were attacked by Bedouin from the tribe of Bnei Jaraakh—and may have constituted either an appeal for support or merely a lyric expression of the poet’s response to the events of his day. It is written in the Spanish-Hebrew *marnin* meter but employs a traditional Eastern strophe and rhyme scheme (*aaaa/bbbb/cccc*). It was clearly not intended for use in the liturgy, though for a while it may have been recited on the Ninth of Av. See detailed notes in Fleischer, “Behinot beShirato shel R. Yosef Ibn Avitor,” *Asufot* 4 (1990). See also commentary in M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 261–62; Ross Brann, “Tavni’ot shel Galut baQinot Ivri’ot ve’Aravi’ot biSefarad,” in *Sefer Yisrael Levin* (Tel Aviv, 1994), p. 49; Goitein, *Mediterranean Society* 5: 58–59; M. Gil, *A History of Palestine* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 385–97. **Line 3:** Zechariah 12:11: “And there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.” Also 2 Kings 23:29. **15:** Lamentations 4:2. **17–18:** Lamentations 4:14. **20:** Hosea 14:1. **30:** Psalms 144:12. **36:** Isaiah 34:15. **41–42:** The previous stanzas all treat suffering and tormented Jewish communities in the wake of the disturbances; they, says the poet, are the ones who need and deserve our pity. Jeremiah 22:10: “Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.” See also the short talmudic poem in *Mo’ed Qatan* 25b: “Weep for those who mourn,/not for what is gone./For the dead at last find rest,/while we’re left in distress.” **45–48:** The Hebrew is somewhat uncertain here; Schirmann suggests that it means, ‘My friend, don’t turn to me with words of consolation’ “[or mourning],” i.e., for the dead.

## A CURSE

Fleischer, “Behinot beShirato shel R. Yosef Ibn Avitor,” p. 163; *Ginzei Schechter* (New York, 1928), 3:320. Schirmann and Fleischer suggest that this poem is either

a generalized curse, to be applied to any enemy, or may have been written for a specific occasion—perhaps Ibn Avitor’s banishment from Spain. Ibn Avitor was no stranger to bans of this sort, and he seems to have made use of his own authority to impose such punishment, especially later in life. The original involves a defective alphabetical acrostic. There are several places where the manuscript is corrupt; these are indicated here by ellipses. This poetic formulation of the ban involves considerable elaboration of the standard formulation, Fleischer notes, and as such is of serious interest. (For that standard formulation, see *Asufot* 4: 165, n. 130, and the sources Fleischer cites there.) While the poem was used in a religious context, it was not, properly speaking, liturgical. Its categorization by Fleischer as a “secular poem” bears witness to the wide range of social situations that term covers. **Line 1:** Isaiah 29:2: “And there shall be mourning and moaning.” **2:** Nahum 2:11: “She is empty, void, and waste.”

#### A PLEA

Fleischer, “Behinot beShirato shel R. Ibn Avitor,” p. 182. The manuscript containing the poem (in Avitor’s own handwriting) is damaged and part of the poem is indecipherable. The poem is written in what would become one of the more common Andalusian meters and maintains the classical monorhyme. **Line 3:** Isaiah 58:6. **7:** Hosea 12:1. **9–10:** Lamentations 1:2. Fleischer sees this *sui generis* poem as a continuation of the “tradition of [uncategorizable] personal, intimate poems,” along the lines of the lyric by the wife of Dunash, and he again notes the counterpoint of grief’s pressure in the speaker and the poem’s expressive restraint. He speculates that it emerges from one of the many arguments that the high-strung and perhaps overly sensitive poet engaged in with his Andalusian and Egyptian peers. This, too, is most likely a late work and along with the previous poem testifies, says Fleischer, to the degree of acceptance the Spanish prosody achieved, for here we have a major figure who had long resisted these innovations suddenly taking on the new style late in life in order to give voice to powerful emotions in a personal fashion.

#### HYMN FOR THE NEW YEAR

*HaShira*, #9; S. Bernstein, “Selihot Bilti Yedu’ot leR. Yosef Ibn Avitor,” *Sura: Sefer HaShana* 1953. A hymn to be recited as part of the liturgy for the Jewish New Year, a *pizmon*. Acrostic: An alphabetical acrostic (*aleph* through *tav*, excepting the final line of each stanza) is woven through the second word of each Hebrew line after the opening stanza; this is followed with the poet’s name, *Yosef HaMeridi* (of Merida). Each stanza ends in a biblical quotation. The translation is an excerpt rendering the Hebrew lines 1–3, 14–23, and 29–38 (the end of the poem). Much of the poem alludes to talmudic passages from *Baba Batra* and *Shabbat*, and on the whole it is modeled on Job 38–41. The former glosses verses

from Job, some of which are also alluded to in the poem. The hymn is designated for the New Year because according to rabbinic tradition, the world was created in the Hebrew month of Tishrei, the first day of which is celebrated as the Jewish New Year. The renewal of the year and its festival, then, also celebrates the renewal of Creation, as cosmic time is aligned with the calendar. The opening stanza was most likely recited as a refrain. **Lines 1–4:** Isaiah 59:9. **5:** The biblical line alluded to here—Psalms 65:2—has been translated in strikingly different ways: the Hirsch Psalms translation seems most relevant: “Peace of soul is an emanation of Thy mighty acts.” JPS has “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion”; NJPS has “praise befits You.” The Soncino Psalms comments, noting the similarity between this verse and Psalms 62:2: “The probable meaning is: ‘Praise, like prayer, is often truest when in deep and still devotion it waits in the presence of God.’” **6:** The translation skips to line 14 of the Hebrew. Jonah 2:4. **5:** *Baba Batra* 73a, where Rabbah tells of seafarers’ legends. A note to the talmudic text explains that the legend probably involved social and political allegories. **10–11:** Job 38:5. **12–13:** *Baba Batra* 16a: “Many drops have I created in the clouds, and for every drop a separate mould, so that two drops should not issue from the same mould, since if two drops issued from the same mould they would wash away the soil, and it would not produce fruit.” **14–15:** Proverbs 30:4. **16–19:** *Midrash Tanhuma, Tazri’a* 4: “Our Rabbis said: A woman sends forth one hundred screams when she is giving birth; ninety-nine are for death, and one for life.” Also *Baba Batra* 16a–b: “The wild goat is heartless towards her young. When she crouches for delivery, she goes up to the top of a mountain so that the young shall fall down and be killed, and I prepare an eagle to catch it in his wings and set it before her, and if he were one second too soon or too late it would be killed.” **20–21:** *Baba Batra* 16b: “‘Canst thou mark when the hinds do calve?’ [Job 34:35] This hind has a narrow womb. I prepare a serpent which bites her at the opening of the womb, and she is delivered of her offspring; and were it one second too soon or too late, she would die.” **24–25:** Job 38:25. **26–31:** The translation skips to line 29 of the Hebrew. The five examples or kinds of fear are cited in *Shabbat* 77b, with Rashi’s commentary there. “Our Rabbis taught: There are five instances of fear [cast] by the weak over the strong.” The elephant fears that the mosquito will enter its trunk (according to the commentary) or its ear (according to legend); the whale fears that the stickleback fish (according to the commentary) will enter its ear. **32:** Job 9:4. **36–37:** Amos 5:9: “It is He who hurls destruction upon strongholds, so that ruin comes upon fortresses.” **38–43:** Other examples of the five fears, from *Shabbat* 77b. The “Ethiopian gnat” is taken from the Soncino commentary. Other commentaries to the passage have “the plague.” According to Rashi the passage refers to “a small animal that terrifies the lion with its loud cry”; he also comments that the spider is reported to enter the scorpion’s ear. “Poison” is not in the Hebrew. The word for “falcon” in the translation is generally rendered, in the Bible for instance, as “eagle.” Rashi comments that the swallow creeps under the larger bird’s wings and hinders it from spreading

them. **44–45:** The final line in the Hebrew is a direct quote from Proverbs 30:4: “Who established the ends of the earth [NJPS: foundations of earth]?” The final English line does not appear in the Hebrew, but echoes Isaiah 42:5.

#### YITZHAQ IBN KHALFOUN

Ibn Khalfoun’s reputation lasted through the early thirteenth century, after which his poetry was lost until fragments of it were discovered, along with some of HaNagid’s work, in the late nineteenth century. Examination of the Cairo Geniza documents, along with other finds, revealed several more fragments, and finally in 1942 mention was found in the Geniza papers of an entire diwan by Ibn Khalfoun, which seems to have been in wide circulation. A critical edition of his work was published in 1961.

#### LOVE IN ME STIRS

*Shirei R. Yitzhaq Ibn Khalfoun*, ed. A. Mirsky (Jerusalem, 1961), #1; *HaShira*, #14. One of the earliest Andalusian poems involving a seemingly “erotic” situation, this short but cunningly constructed lyric has generated considerable scholarly debate, and as such demonstrates the elusive nature of this literature. (See also Moshe Ibn Ezra’s “Heart’s Desire,”; Yitzhaq HaGorni’s lament, and Shelomo HaLevi’s “Memory’s Wine,” which have also given rise to strikingly different readings.) Some readers have understood the poem as a tragic romantic episode, others seen it as entirely comic or “lightly ironic,” and still others have viewed it as tragicomic. By the same token some consider it an inarticulate expression reflecting an early stage of literary development (anticipating the courtly lyric), while others think of it as a sophisticated departure from courtly expectations (as established in the Arabic tradition). Finally, scholars disagree about both the autobiographical and erotic dimensions of the poem: some read the first person of the poem as a conventional figure, while others feel it represents the poet; some understand the poem as an embodiment of “chasteness and restrained desire,” while others suggest it reflects the standard hedonism of the Arabic erotic poem. Tova Rosen’s feminist reading rejects all of these interpretations (by men) and treats the poem instead as a self-portrait of the poet as a man “writing like a woman.” In that reading, both the poet and his beloved are “victims of patriarchy.” The poem’s ambiguity, it seems to me, permits all of these interpretations, though I find it hard to read the poem without recognizing in it at least some element of comedy and self-mockery. See *Prooftexts* 16/1 (1996): 5–13, and *Unveiling Eve*, pp. 61–62. **Line 1:** Song of Songs 2:8: “Hark! My beloved! Behold, he cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping [NJPS: bounding] upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart. . . . Behold, he . . . looketh in through the windows.” **2:** Literally, “to see the eyes of

my glorious one (*kevuda*.)” The word *kevuda* is drawn from Psalms 45:14, which is often translated as “All glorious is the king’s daughter within the palace”; in medieval literature the word came to represent the young woman or lady whose honor was guarded (“within”) by her (patriarchal) family. Hence the “uncle, father, and, brother.” “Uncle,” which appears last in the series in the Hebrew, can also be understood as “beloved” or “betrothed.” See also Psalms 27:4: “To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” (NJPS). **6:** Literally, “as though I were not her beloved.” **8:** Or, “her only son,” as in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac.

#### A GIFT OF CHEESE

*Shirei Ibn Khalfoun*, #23; *HaShira*, #16. **Line 2:** 1 Kings 8:28. **3:** Psalms 61:4; Jeremiah 16:19; Judges 9:21. **4:** Psalms 91:4. **5:** Isaiah 4:6. **7–8:** The allusion is ironic; whereas Elkanah (1 Samuel 1:2–4) gave Peninnah a single portion, he gave a double portion to the childless Hannah. **10:** Some read the final line as “What good is cheese when I’m suffering?”

#### SHMU’EL HANAGID

Muslim chroniclers of the day describe HaNagid with a mixture of admiration and condescension, singling out, among many other qualities, his tremendous learning, wisdom, courtesy, energy, and political savvy—along with his excellent command of classical Arabic—but noting as well his ignorance when it came to his choice of religion. At least one text by the famous Arab writer Ibn Hazm (who engaged the young Shmu’el in a religious debate) is far more scathing about what he calls his materialism, arrogance, and religious backwardness. More detailed discussion of HaNagid’s role in the Muslim administration and how he was perceived by Muslim writers can be found in Ross Brann, *Power in the Portrayal* (Princeton, 2002). For excellent analysis of his identification with biblical characters and his use of biblical typology, see Brann’s *The Compunctious Poet* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 46ff.

#### BEN TEHILLIM

The 222 poems of *Ben Tehillim* were originally copied out by HaNagid’s son Yehosef, when he was eight and a half and continuing until 1056. Yehosef also added descriptive headings to the poems, possibly as dictated in Arabic by his father. For an English translation of the full preface, see my *Selected Poems of Shmuel HaNagid* (Princeton, 1996)—hereafter Cole, *Selected HaNagid*—which also contains more detailed notes and an introduction to the work. The preface also indicates that the shorter poems were recited to musical accompaniment, though we know very little about

the nature of that music or its relation to the words themselves. In addition to D. Yarden's edition of these poems, *Ben Tehillim* (Jerusalem, 1966/85), hereafter *BT*, I have also consulted the earlier edition prepared by A. M. Habermann, *Diwan, veKalul bo Sefer Ben Tehillim* (Tel Aviv, 1947).

#### ON FLEEING HIS CITY

*BT*, #67; *HaShira*, #23. HaNagid fled the battle of 1013 when, after three years of ethnic unrest in the region, Berbers under the leadership of Suleiman al-Mustai' in stormed the city and massacred its population, including some sixty scholars. HaNagid eventually made his way from Cordoba to Malaga, normally a four-day journey of some ninety miles to the southeast, but probably double that in this instance; we know from another poem of his ("Pass of Sand," #19) that HaNagid took an indirect route, passing through Ecija, Osuna, and Morón, all of which are southwest of Cordoba. Malaga (directly to the south) was safe because it was ruled by a Slavic governor who had made a pact with the Berbers. **Heading**: "And this in his youth, on leaving Cordoba." **Lines 1–2**: Literally, "Soul from that which it desires is cut off, and soul from that which it wants is blocked." The verb in the first line of the Hebrew has two variant readings. Yarden reads *geru'a* (deriving it from Exodus 5:8); Schirrmann reads *gedu'a*, "cut down," or "distanced." My somewhat free translation reflects Schirrmann's text. **3–4**: Deuteronomy 31:20; Isaiah 30:23. **4–5**: "Precious being" in the original reads, literally, "honorable soul." Ecclesiastes 6:7. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 6:6: "If you bring [the soul] all sorts of worldly delights, they mean nothing to it. Why? Because it is from the most high." Bernard Septimus comments that the longing in the poem is neither religious nor philosophical so much as aristocratic or high-minded. "He'erot leDivrei HaZa"l beShirat Sefarad," *Tarbiz* 53 (1984): 608. He compares it to Aristotle's notion in the *Ethics* (1123a–1125b): "A person seems to be magnanimous in thinking himself worthy of great things when he is worthy." **9**: "pulse of man's flesh"—literally, "flesh of man's flesh." **12–15**: The Hebrew here has an intricate weave, picking up on the sound (*ra'a*) at the end of line 3 in the original. The roots involved in this sound can mean either evil/trouble, or companion/friend. The Hebrew reads: *vehanefesh b'ra'ah/veyesh re'im mere'im*. The English mirrors the effect of the Hebrew sound and syntax. **19**: Jeremiah 4:30. **20**: Job 34:35. **22**: Deuteronomy 14:7. **23–25**: The Hebrew contains a play on the words for "white" (as in purity or innocence) and "moon," which in Hebrew are both *levana*. So the line might also read as follows: "Should someone whose soul is white [or "a moon," or "moonlike"] . . . ?" **26–28**: Psalms 139:9. **29–31**: 1 Kings 10:7; 2 Chronicles 9:5–6. **37**: The Passover Haggada: "If he had only split the sea for us . . .," from the Seder song "Dayenu," a hymn that dates to the second century B.C.E. **38**: The Hebrew is unclear. Yarden understands the line to read: "with every twisting swimmer [sail]." My reading in this case is based on Schirrmann's text, which says: "and split the sea and every twisted trench." **39–40**: Literally, "and sail [roam] in

ascent to the peak, which only eternity knows.” **44–46:** Exodus 21:5–6. Literally, “And I will bore with an awl through the ear of free men [i.e., they will choose to be faithful to me out of love], and as for me an ear to my friends will be pierced.” **47:** Literally, “and for me soul will hold fast to friends, and for me soul will avoid obstructors.” Here and in the following lines the English collapses several of the Hebrew lines and the rendering is free. **49–53:** Esther 3:12; Song of Songs 8:7; Exodus 39:6; Psalms 68:14; Jeremiah 22:14. **54–55:** Schirmann reads: “your soul, which God loves.” Yarden reads: “your soul, which I love.” Job 33:24. **56–57:** Psalms 68:21. **58:** I.e., forever. Psalms 72:7: “In his days let the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon be no more.”

#### THE MIRACLE AT SEA

*BT*, #108; *HaShira*, #22. Tova Rosen calls this “in many respects the strangest poem in the diwan . . . and in medieval Hebrew poetry at large.” She argues that the poem reflects the conventions of a typical medieval poem about a “fantastic voyage” rather than a simple representation of the poet’s experience. HaNagid may, however, have taken such a trip in his youth. In particular, Rosen suggests that HaNagid drew from *The Seven Voyages of Sinbad* or something like it. (See T. Rosen-Moked, “A Hebrew Mariner and the Sea Monster,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 1/2 [1986].) Some scholars feel that HaNagid’s journey—if in fact the poem is based on an actual voyage—occurred while he was still a student in Cordoba, possibly as part of a business apprenticeship; others suggest that it took place after he settled in Malaga. **Heading:** “And he sailed the sea in his youth with merchants and they encountered a beast called *tina* by those who know the creatures of the sea, and they have established that no one who met this creature at sea has ever escaped in peace, and God saved them from its assault, and he recited this poem in which he described what happened.” **Line 1:** Literally, “Is there a power to stand [or recover] for one who stumbles?” Leviticus 26:36–37. **3:** Psalms 38:1: “When my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me”; 2 Samuel 22:37; Psalms 18:37. **5–8:** Amos 6:8. The meaning of these lines in the Hebrew is uncertain, and Yarden and Schirmann differ in their readings here. Schirmann reads: “By my soul, the All [God] will come to help and comfort the afflicted soul. By their souls, there is none who would come on the day of my confusion, and they saw me confused.” The translation reflects Yarden’s text. **10:** Ezekiel 29:11–12. **11:** 1 Samuel 2:8; Psalms 113:7; Isaiah 25:12. **15–16:** *Sefer Yetzira* 8: “Keep your mouth from speaking and your heart from its speculation.” **17–18:** Proverbs 24:21; Isaiah 33:15. **19–20:** 1 Samuel 2:12–34; Numbers 25; Genesis 38:8–10. **21–22:** Deuteronomy 6:7. From the daily liturgy, the *Shema*. **23–24:** Numbers 22:3; Psalms 22:24; Deuteronomy 32:27, 1:17; 1 Samuel 18:15; Job 41:17, 19:29. **25–26:** The Quran 112:3: “In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, Say: He is God, One God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not anyone” (Arberry translation). **33–34:**

Ezekiel 27:6. **37:** Job 20:17 and 29:6. **45:** “Karhah”: Yarden notes that the animal was also referred to as a *tina*, which is drawn from a Spanish word (*tiña*) indicating a condition that causes baldness. The creature’s name recalls the Hebrew *keireyah*, or bald. Schirmann suggests that the name comes from the Greek *karharias*, “shark” (in Hebrew, *karish*). *Baba Batra* 73–77 mentions a number of sea monsters and offers a variety of wild narratives and descriptions; 74a in particular mentions *karisa*, probably shark (see note to lines 71–72). Rosen notes that the name does not exist in related literatures, in contemporary books on zoology and seafaring, or in dictionaries. She agrees with Schirmann and points out that a large shark could easily have upended the typical sailing vessels of the time, which were small. **46:** Ezekiel 31:8. **49–50:** Isaiah 33:21. Literally, “gallant ships” or “mighty craft.” **56:** Psalms 139:15. **57:** Job 40:25; Isaiah 27:1; Song of Songs 7:8. **58:** Isaiah 33:21. **62:** Song of Songs 7:5; Song of Songs 4:15; Job 41:12; Exodus 19:18; Ezekiel 23:32; Job 40:23. **63–66:** Psalms 119:83; Judges 4:19; Ecclesiastes 10:12; Exodus 28:32; Exodus 39:23. **67–70:** Song of Songs 7:3–5 (as above, lines 60–62); Psalms 91:4; Nahum 2:4. **71–72:** Literally, “And its girth to those looking on was like Tyre in the midst of the sea or Dumah”—which refers to the two cities. The English plays off the word for Tyre (Tsor), akin to the Hebrew *tzur*, meaning cliff, rock, fortress, or refuge. The biblical passage this verse is based on can be read in a number of ways. Ezekiel 27:32 (old and new JPS versions): “Who was there like Tyre fortified in the midst of the sea?” “Who was like Tyre when she was silenced in the midst of the sea?” Also, *Baba Batra* 73b: “Rabbah b. Bar Hana further stated: Once we were traveling on board a ship and saw a fish whose back was covered with sand out of which grew grass. Thinking it was dry land we went up and baked and cooked upon its back. When, however, its back was heated it turned, and had not the ship been nearby we should have been drowned.” **73:** Isaiah 10:14. **74–75:** Job 40:17. **76–77:** Ezekiel 21:12; Micah 1:4; Psalms 22:15; Psalms 69:3. **78:** Psalms 131:2; Isaiah 53:7. **82:** 2 Kings 17:30. The Hebrew name Ashemah suggests “guilt” (*ashma*). **83:** Judges 18:4. **84:** Proverbs 5:22. **85–86:** Jonah 2:1–11. **87–88:** Judges 9:16; Isaiah 3:10–11. **91–92:** Exodus 15:1: “The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea”; Exodus 15:4: “And his chosen captains are sunk in the Red Sea.” **94:** 1 Samuel 25:37. **95:** Zechariah 3:2: “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan.” **97–98:** Psalms 22:7; Job 25:6; Judges 9:48; Ezekiel 37:6. **100:** Isaiah 9:16; Exodus 14:8. **103:** Fleischer reads “angered” or “aroused” instead of “accursed.” **108:** Job 12:6. **109–12:** Job 26:7: “He . . . hangeth the earth over nothing”; Psalms 95:5: “The sea is His, and He made it”; Isaiah 51:10. **112–14:** Isaiah 44:10; Proverbs 8:23; Psalms 68:36. **115:** *Berakhot* 54b: “Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: There are four [classes of people] who have to offer thanksgiving: those who have crossed the sea. . . . Let them give thanks unto the Lord for His mercy, and for His wonderful works to the children of men.” **115–16:** Deuteronomy 31:19. **117ff.:** Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” The passage from here through to the end resembles Maimonides’ Thirteen Articles of Faith (twelfth century) and several precursor lists of “principles,” beginning with Philo’s. **121–23:** Ecclesiastes 12:10–11;

*Baba Batra* 64a: “And I heard them say, ‘Moses and his law are truth and we are liars.’” **124–25:** Proverbs 3:17. **126–28:** Ecclesiastes 12:14; Psalms 90:8. **131:** Exodus 20:17; Jeremiah 31:33: “I will put my Law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it.”

## THE APPLE

*BT*, #114, 116. **Composite Heading:** “And he mentioned being at this house where one of the poets recited a poem [in Arabic] about a bowl of fine and beautiful apples which were brought before him. One of the company translated the poem into Hebrew. And then they implored him to respond with a version of his own, and he improvised the following.” These two riddlelike poems are taken from the series of fifteen that HaNagid improvised in various classical meters; they seem to be about the aesthetic and ethic of the Andalusian court. **Line 5:** Song of Songs 4:14.

## THE GAZELLE

*BT*, #183; *HaShira*, #52:19. For more on the figure of the gazelle, and on erotic and homoerotic poetry generally, see the glossary at the back of this volume under “gazelle” and “desire, poems of.” Cf. also the introduction (under, “Translation and Trace of That Power”) and Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death*, pp. 77–89. **Line 6:** Deuteronomy 32:14: “And of the blood of the grape thou drankest foaming wine.” **7:** Literally, “cut like a *yod* [the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet: a crescent],” possibly for *yayyin* (wine). I have translated it as “D,” for “Drink” (or “Death”—according to *Genesis Rabbah* 13:10, God made the afterworld from the letter *yod*) and for the shape of the half-moon as it curves to the right. The image of the moon like a letter is also common in Arabic poetry of the time: “The air was clear, and the moon was bound in brightness, which shone toward the west, like a blue page with a silver dot of a golden N.” For *shahar*, see Joel 2:2: “as blackness spread upon the mountains,” and Shulamit Elitzur, *Shirat HaHol Ha'Ivrit biSefarad HaMuslamit*, p. 133.

## JASMINE

*BT*, #129; *HaShira*, #49. **Line 2:** Exodus 28:17.

## IN FACT I LOVE THAT FAWN

*BT*, #162; *HaShira*, #51b. **Lines 1–2:** Song of Songs 6:2: “My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.” (The words for “lily” and “rose” are often confused.) **3:** Exodus 15:7. **4–5:** Literally, “If you could see the one I love with your eyes/your lovers would

pursue you but you would not be there.” Job 7:21. **6–7:** Judges 14:9: “But he told them not that he had scraped the honey out of the body of the lion.” **11:** Joshua 3:10: “Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you.” **12:** 1 Samuel 25:24: “And she fell at his feet, and said: ‘Upon me, my lord, upon me be the iniquity.’”

#### MIXED IN SPAIN

*BT*, #146; *HaShira*, #52:7. **Lines 3–4:** “Prized” is per Schirmann’s reading. Others understand, “mixed in Espamya, its scent [or bouquet] reaches India.” Esther 1:1. *Espamya* is a rabbinic term for Spain. See *Niddah* 30b: “A person sleeping here [in Babylonia] might see a dream in Espamya.” **5–6:** Literally, “weak in its goblets [or vessel].” Song of Songs 7:3; Abu Nuwas: “Its power rises to heads and temples; as for its taste, it is like butter.” **7–8:** Deuteronomy 32:14; *Erubin* 65a: “R. Hanin observed: Wine was created for the sole purpose of comforting mourners and rewarding the wicked; for it is said, ‘Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul (Proverbs 31:6–7).’” The tenth-century Damascene poet Abu Alfaraj al-Wa’wa’ writes: “Drink, by the flowers of the gardens, wine which banishes all worry with instant joy.” **9–10:** Joel 4:3; Obadiah 1:11; Nahum 3:10.

#### YOUR YEARS ARE SLEEP

*BT*, #130; *HaShira*, #52:1. **Line 1:** Arabic literary tradition attributes a similar saying to the prophet Muhammad. Other versions of this idea appear in two Indian story collections, *The Prince and the Monk*, in Ibn Hasdai’s Hebrew translation—“As the wise man said: men while they live are asleep, and when they die, they wake”—and in *Kalila and Dimna* (see note to Ibn Hasdai’s “Luxuries Ease”): “My soul, my soul, do not distance the morrow and rely on today; for your tomorrow is your awakening, and this day is your dream.” **5:** Psalms 68:36. **6–8:** *Hagigah* 13a: “And R. Aha b. Jacob said: There is still another Heaven above the heads of the living creatures, for it is written: ‘And over the heads of the living creatures there was a likeness of a firmament, like the color of the terrible ice, stretched forth over their heads above’ (Ezekiel 1:22). Thus far you have permission to speak, thenceforward you have not permission to speak, for so it is written in the Book of Ben Sira: ‘Seek not things that are too hard for thee, and search not out things that are hidden from thee. The things that have been permitted thee, think thereupon; thou hast no business with the things that are secret.’” **9:** Whereas the poem begins in a moralistic vein, by line 9 it seems to be clear that this is merely a strategy of misdirection, or complication, and the theme of *carpe diem* is now brought out more fully. **11:** 1 Samuel 16:17; Ezekiel 33:32; Psalms 46:1. The meaning of *alamoth* is uncertain. “Lute” is based on Yarden’s reading: “an ancient musical instrument.” It might also refer to one

“who loves to sing [a certain kind of melody].” **12–13:** Genesis 9:20–21: “And Noah, the husbandman, began and planted a vineyard.” Abu Nuwas writes: “I asked the wine merchant: ‘How long has it been since the presser pressed [them]?’ He answered: ‘This is beyond my powers of computation. They’ve told me that my grandfather’s father chose it, from Adam’s cellars, or Eve’s.’” Another poem of his describes wine as follows: “This wine saw Noah, who was already old and gray; and it saw hundreds of years before Noah.” **14:** Job 28:18. **20:** 1 Chronicles 25:1–6. Jerimoth, the son of Heman the Levite, whom David appointed to serve with his sons as Temple singers. **22:** I.e., all such (excellent) wine, or, in keeping with *Berakhot* 34b, a reference to the wine made during the six days of Creation, which was stored up and held for the righteous in the afterlife. **24–26:** Ecclesiastes 9:7: “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart.” Qohelet is the preacher of Ecclesiastes and the Hebrew name for the book itself. (Also *Nedarim* 10b and the Jerusalem Talmud *Qiddushin* 66b, which allude to the talmudic ideal that a person will be judged after his death for the pleasures foregone in life.) As Dan Pagis notes (*HaShir Davur ‘al Ofnav*, ed. E. Fleischer [Jerusalem, 1993], pp. 29–49), the poem is based on the assumption common to the *memento mori* tradition, i.e., that one should remember the day of one’s death and that the soul will live on, but it rejects that tradition’s conclusion and its call for restraint or even asceticism. On the other hand, the poem rejects the assumption of the *carpe diem* tradition, i.e., that the soul won’t last and there is no life after death, but accepts its conclusion: drink and take pleasure in life while you can. In fact, the poet sees it as a commandment, just as he sees the rejection of God’s gifts as a transgression. Pagis therefore links the conclusion of this poem not only with Ecclesiastes 9:7 but with Ecclesiastes 11:9: “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Also *Berakhot* 51a: “Whoever says the blessing over a full cup is given an inheritance without bounds [i.e., the world to come].”

#### THE HOUSE OF PRAYER

*BT*, #83; *HaShira*, #45. **Line 1:** Literally, “Is time behaving insolently against [bullying] Rabbi Judah HaNasi, [the redactor of the Mishna in the third century C.E.] and Rava [a Babylonian *amora*, or teacher, who died in 352 C.E.]?” Isaiah 3:5. **5–6:** Mephibosheth was Saul’s grandson and Jonathan’s son. Tsiba was Saul’s servant. 2 Samuel 9:6–13. Also *Berakhot* 4a: “Why then was he called Mephibosheth? Because he humiliated David in the Halakha.” (*Me-phi-bosheth* means “Out of my mouth humiliation.”) **6:** Rav Hai HaGaon was the last of the Babylonian *gaonim*, or leaders of the Yeshivot there. The leading talmudist of HaNagid’s time, he died in 1038. **7:** Numbers 15:38. **10:** The allusion is to the holiday of Hoshana Rabba, on the seventh day of Sukkot, when willow sprigs are beaten in the synagogue.

Margoliot's *Sefer Hilkhoh HaNagid*, which collects HaNagid's halakhic commentary, contains an entry on the beating of willow sprigs. **11**: HaNagid is referring to the sound of a crowd one often hears coming from a synagogue or house of study. **17–19**: Genesis 37:30: "And as for me, whither shall I go?"; Isaiah 8:20. Literally, "They've changed the testimony and Torah." **17–19**: Literally; "like a tamarisk in the wilderness." The students were moving their bodies in traditional fashion during study and prayer. Jeremiah 17:6. **21**: There are variant readings for this line. My reading is based on Habermann's texts. **23**: Literally, "In their mouths they abused Hillel and Shammai and struck on the cheek Rabbi Akiva." 2 Kings 19:22; Micah 4:14. Hillel and Shammai are the two major authorities cited in the Mishna. Akiva is one of the great heroes of postbiblical Judaism. One of the most important *tannaim*, or scholars of the first generation, he died while being tortured by the Romans during the Bar Kokhba rebellion, circa 132 C.E. **25**: The teacher would take whatever noise they made as a sign of comprehension and agreement and go on with his nonsense. **30–31**: Daniel 10:6; *Menahot* 43b: "R. Meir used to say, A man is bound to say one hundred blessings daily, as it is written, 'And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee?'" (The Hebrew word for "what" (*ma*) is interpreted as though it were *me'ah*, which means "a hundred") **32–33**: *Menahot* 43b: "R. Judah used to say, A man is bound to say the following three blessings daily: '[Blessed art Thou . . .] who hast not made me a heathen,' ' . . . who hast not made me a woman'; and . . . 'who hast not made me a brutish man.'" The prayer 'who hast not made me a woman' is part of the morning liturgy. See the fourteenth-century poem on this topic by Qalonymos Ben Qalonymos, below. **34–35**: Literally, "Would you put your soul among the males [or masculine], when the Lord will testify against you that you are feminine?" The word for "feminine" (*neqeva*) is akin to the words for "punctured" or "holed" (*naqv*), "anus" (*naquva*), and "to blaspheme" (*naqav*).

#### THE CRITIQUE

*BT*, #82. **Heading**: "In which he responds to someone who sent him a weak poem." **Line 1**: Psalms 45:14: "All glorious is the king's daughter within the palace; her raiment is of chequer work wrought with gold." **2**: Ecclesiastes 2:8. **3**: Isaiah 10:16. **4**: Psalms 45:9; Exodus 30:23–24. **8**: Literally, "while yours were white [as hail]." **9–10**: Numbers 31:23. Literally, "but this poem is impure." **11**: A line from the Hebrew has been omitted here. Literally, "I weighed it against your poems, which were as grooms, but this one among them would be outlawed." Jeremiah 31:20. **16**: Psalms 57:5: "and their tongue a sharp sword."

#### ON LIFTING THE SIEGE

*BT*, #11; *HaShira*, #34. Located some 120 miles northeast of Granada, on the slopes of the Sierra del Cano, Lorca was one of the most famous fortresses in

Andalusia. HaNagid's troops were sent to aid the city, which was under siege by Ibn Abi 'Ammaar, the ruler of neighboring Almeria after the death of Zuhair. **Heading:** "When those who were laying siege to Lorca heard that the troops were approaching the city, they quickly fled, and our army sped toward Lorca and camped there, where he wrote me the following." **Line 1:** Carrier pigeons had been used by the Greeks since the fifth century B.C.E., and references to them are not unusual in medieval Spain. **4:** Song of Songs 3:6: "perfumed with myrrh and frankincense"; also Song of Songs 4:14. **10:** Literally, "from the beam over the entrance." Proverbs 9:3. **12:** Job 41:5: "Wilt thou play with him as with a bird?" **16–18:** 1 Kings 22:17: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd." **17:** Hosea 13:3: "They shall be . . . as the chaff that is driven with the wind out of the threshing floor." **19:** Psalms 54:9, 58:11, 118:7. **20:** Psalms 63:7, 90:4. **23–25:** Psalms 69:7; Job 6:20: "They were ashamed because they had hoped; they came thither, and were confounded"; Jeremiah 2:26: "As the thief is ashamed when he is found"; Leviticus 25:29; Exodus 22:1. **26–28:** Psalms 71:13, 109:29: "Mine adversaries shall be clothed with confusion, and shall put on their own shame as a robe"; Exodus 29:13. **29–30:** Job 34:7; Ezekiel 23:33–34; Isaiah 51:17: "Thou hast drunken the beaker, even the cup of staggering, and drained it." **31–32:** Jeremiah 4:31; Psalms 55:5; Jeremiah 6:24. **35:** 1 Samuel 14:29. **36–37:** Isaiah 65:14. **38–39:** Isaiah 22:4. **40:** 2 Samuel 22:2–3; Psalms 18:3: "The Lord is my rock . . . my high tower." **45–46:** Deuteronomy 6:6–8: "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; . . . thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hands [arms]"; Proverbs 3:3: "Write them upon the table of thy heart"; Job 19:24: "With an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever."

#### THE WAR WITH YADDAYIR

*BT*, #7; *HaShira*, #31. Yaddayir (the Hebrew vocalization is Schirmann's; the name is pronounced "Yiddiir" in Buluggin's Arabic chronicle, *The Tibyaan*) was a cousin of Granada's King Badiis and aspired to his throne. The battle took place at Argona, which is east of Cordoba and north of Granada. Almunezar, where Yaddayir was eventually imprisoned, is south of Granada, on the coast. **Heading:** "And Yaddayir the commander came to the place known as Argona in the year 4801 [1041], and with him were Waasil and Muwaafaq, both of them well-known officers among the Andalusian leaders, and they overcame Argona and killed the commander of the city. Afterward they marched to a place known as Samantin and overcame most of the castles there. And then our forces went out against them and the hand of God was with them and they killed Waasil and Muwaafaq. And Yaddayir fled until he was trapped at Cordoba and he was taken from there and imprisoned in the castle of Munekar. And my lord, my father, spoke of what happened to him and how he fared, praising God for having granted him this great victory." **Line 1:** Psalms 39:14, Job 14:6. **2:** Proverbs 4:20, 2:2. **3–4:** Psalms 27:1. **7:** Proverbs 5:9–10. **8–10:** Jeremiah 33:9; Exodus 9:17. **12:** Ruth 1:18; Ezekiel

2:8: “Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house”—where God instructs the prophet to listen to Him and accept His word, and not to be like those who have rebelled against Him; 2 Chronicles 13:7. **16:** Psalms 16:5. **18:** Psalms 62:8. **22:** Cf. “A Day of Distress and Anguish” (in Cole, *Selected HaNagid*) in which the archangels Gabriel and Michael appear to HaNagid. Also Exodus 18:4. **23:** Leviticus 26:39. **24:** Literally, “My fate is decreed from the heavens.” **26:** Literally, “there are people in life who never rule, like Tivni who died before his time, and Zimri.” 1 Kings 16:10, 15–22. **28:** Exodus 2:11. **29–30:** Proverbs 13:23. **32:** Job 7:16, 10:20, and 21:13: “They spend their days in prosperity.” **33–35:** Ezekiel 24:23; Proverbs 5:15: “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well”; Psalms 23:2, 116:13. **36–37:** Psalms 16:5 (as in line 16, above); Job 10:3. **38:** Ezekiel 23:25. **40:** Psalms 66:12. **43–44:** Psalms 17:11; Jeremiah 18:22; Psalms 9:16. **43–49:** Isaiah 11:6. This stanza tries to mirror the complex weave of the Hebrew: *Ani evtah be’el hepil ashurai betoh pahim temanum le-ashuri/beyom ba tzar le’ir meevtzar, vetavah/betoho sar kemo egel v’kheemri/vetzar zeh m’she’air malkhi—v’ra’at/rehoki tehsar mai’ra she’airi.* **50:** Waasil and Muwaafaq were the two princes. **51:** Cf. Genesis 10:18 for the Zemarites, who were a Canaanite people. In this context, they stand for the Slavs. The city they seized was Argona. The Slavs were for the most part of Christian origin and from territories in Europe that were ruled by non-Muslims. The name derives from the Greek *sklavas*, for slave. Often mercenaries, they were a distinct population within the Andalusian mix and maintained their own communities. **52:** The fortress (or forts) at Samantin, near the city of Jaén, fifty miles due north of Granada. Psalms 91:5–6; Deuteronomy 32:24. **57–61:** Hosea 7:12; Isaiah 51:20; Job 39:18; Isaiah 17:6: “Yet there shall be left therein gleanings, as at the beating of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the branches of the fruitful tree, saith the Lord.” **62:** Isaiah 17:6. The long Hebrew vowel referred to here (*tzeri*—pronounced *ai*) has two dots side by side beneath a letter while the short one (*segol*—pronounced *eh*) has three dots arranged in an inverted triangle beneath a letter. **65:** Deuteronomy 1:4. **66:** Leviticus 26:27. **69:** Isaiah 18:7. **71:** “My friend”—the same skeptical acquaintance to whom the opening of the poem is addressed. **82:** 1 Samuel 12:11; Psalms 99:6; and *Rosh Hashana* 25b: “‘Moses and Aaron among his priests and Samuel among them that call on his name.’ Jephthah in his generation [of his age] is like Samuel in his generation [of his age], to teach you that the most worthless, once he has been appointed a leader of the community, is to be accounted like the mightiest of the mighty.” **83:** 1 Samuel 10:11: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” **85–86:** Exodus 6:16, 22–24. All of the people mentioned in these lines are descendants of Levi and therefore among the cult of the Temple musicians. HaNagid reminds his listeners (as he does even more forcefully in the wine poem “Have You Heard How I Helped the Wise?” [Cole, *Selected HaNagid*, p. 65]) that he too is a Levite and of a lineage befitting a poet. **89:** Hosea 5:13. **90:** Psalms 39:1: “For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.” **93–96:** *Numbers Rabbah* 19: “‘Then sang Israel’—Israel reasoned thus: It is Thy duty to perform miracles for

us, and our duty to bless and praise Thy name.” Also Psalms 55:15; Jeremiah 8:22. **97–98:** Deuteronomy 24:14–15.

#### ON THE DEATH OF ISAAC, HIS BROTHER

The poems included under this title are taken from a series of eighteen elegies that HaNagid composed in the wake of his older brother Isaac’s death. Isaac was forty-eight at the time. The order of the poems here in some cases departs from that of the diwan. A fuller selection from the sequence can be found in Cole, *Selected HaNagid*, pp. 21ff.

*First child of my mother:*

*BT*, #91; *HaShira*, #30:2. **Heading:** “And he recited this in which he describes his going in to see him and his kissing him while he was lying on his bed.” **Line 1:** Literally, “Firstborn of my mother, the first of death [the angel of death] has stolen you.” The English has departed from this somewhat to maintain a semblance of the Hebrew’s weave and the tension between “firstborn” and “first of death.” Job 18:13: “Yea, the firstborn of death shall devour his members.” **9:** Literally, “curtain.” **12:** Literally, “on the day of your affliction [or misfortune].” **13:** *Eruvin* 65b: “R. Ila’i said: By three things may a person’s character be determined: By his cup (*koso*), by his purse (*keeso*), and by his anger (*ka’aso*).” Also Psalms 16:5. **22–27:** Isaiah 29:10: “For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes.” **28–30:** Job 5:26, 30:2, and *Bereshit Rabbah* 79:1: “And you will come fresh toward the grave.”

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*Give up, heart:*

*BT*, #88. **Heading:** “And then he said.” **Line 1:** Ecclesiastes 2:20. **5–8:** Literally, “Live after him in misery, and if you’d request respite from his grief [the grief of his death], die like him.”

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*Why should I force:*

*BT*, #89. **Heading:** “And he said when he tore his clothes in mourning for him.” **Lines 1–4:** Literally, “Why should I tear my clothes and garments [as a traditional sign of mourning]?” 1 Samuel 4:12; Job 13:28: “Though I am . . . like a garment that is moth-eaten”; Joel 2:13. **5–8:** Literally, “Why put dirt on my robes [or dress]?”—another traditional sign of mourning. “Slime-filled pits” allude to the biblical Vale of Siddim, as in Genesis 14:10: “Now the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits, and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell there.” The line is saying, “I do not need the (literal) dirt of his grave on my robe to show that I am mourning—the thoughts (of my heart) are so dark.” **11–12:** Breaking cups was another sign of mourning. **13–16:** The Hebrew plays on the words for

“walls” or “sides” of my heart (*tzeedei levavi*) and “thorns” (*tziddim*) and its melic weave is again conspicuous. Acoustic correspondences in the English function here in place of the puns. Judges 2:3; and *Mo’ed Qatan* 22b: “For all dead [except for one’s father and mother], one tacks the rent together after seven [days] and [completely] reunites [the edges] after thirty [days].” 17–18: Literally, “the walls of my heart.” Jeremiah 4:19. 19–20: In other words, the pain will continue well after the official display of mourning is over. Ecclesiastes 9:8. 21–24: Exodus 25:15: “The staves shall be in the rings of the [holy] ark; they shall not be taken from it.” 27–28: Literally, “from my soul [my life] will forever be distant.”

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*My language:*

*BT*, #92; *HaShira*, #30:3. **Heading:** “And he said, describing his being wrapped in the shroud and lowered into his grave, may God have mercy upon him.” **Line 1:** Literally, “My tongue [or language].” The Hebrew carries the double meaning that the contemporary English “tongue” strains for. Judges 8:24. **3:** The translation is literal, but idiomatically conveys, “by my life.” **6–7:** The Hebrew here means that Isaac was like a father to HaNagid and others. He was a friend who looked out for them. **9:** Hosea 5:11 (where the Hebrew is uncertain). **10–12:** Job 31:32. **13–15:** Psalms 78:72; Isaiah 11:7–9: “And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together.” **19:** Jeremiah 4:31: “For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her that bringeth forth her first child.” **21–22:** 1 Samuel 4:12. See note to “Why should I force” (above), lines 1 and 13. *Mo’ed Qatan* 22b and 24a: “For all [other] dead, if he desires, he bares [his shoulder—and also bares his heart] and if he does not desire he does not bare it.” “Samuel said, Any rending [of clothes] not done in the flush [of grief] is not a [proper] rending.” A line of the original has been omitted here: “my face covered.” **28–29:** 2 Samuel 19:1: “Thus [King David] said: ‘O my son Absalom . . . would I had died for thee.’” **36:** “My soul” is a literal reading. The expression often means “my life.” Psalms 22:20: “O Thou my strength”; 1 Kings 19:4: “O Lord, Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”

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*Tell him, please:*

*BT*, #95. **Heading:** “And afterward he said.” **Line 4:** Proverbs 27:20. “Destruction” in the Hebrew plays on the root for lost. **10:** Literally, “Until I’m laid by his side.” The repetition of “dust” mirrors the repetition of the *esh* sound in the Hebrew, which runs through the poem and, on its own, means “fire.”

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*A brother is in me:*

*BT*, #101. **Heading:** “And he recited this when his letters stopped and others’ arrived instead.” **Lines 3–4:** Jeremiah 2:25.

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*Twelve months have passed:*

*BT*, #103; *HaShira*, #30:6. **Heading:** “And he recited this after a year had passed since his death.” **Lines 2–3:** Psalms 91:3: “He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.” **4:** Job 21:33: “The clods of the valley are sweet unto him.” **7:** Psalms 107:32. **9–10:** Zechariah 14:12: “Their flesh shall consume away . . . and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets.” **11:** Ezekiel 37:11; Isaiah 56:3: “Behold, I am a dry tree.” **13–14:** Literally, “eats along his skin.” Isaiah 50:9: “They all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.”

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*A psalm to the hearer:*

*BT*, #104. **Heading:** “And when his grief had passed and he was consoled in his mourning, he recited the following.” This poem is also found in *Ben Qohelet* (Abramson, 395), with several variants. **Lines 1–2:** Psalms 65:3: “O Thou that hearest prayer, to Thee doth all flesh come.” **3:** Psalms 33:1. **5:** Psalms 49:3. **7–9:** Yarden notes the parallel in the Arabic poetry of Abu ‘Ali al-Qali al-Baghdadi: “God, may He be magnified and exalted, created everything small, and after a time they grow large, except for grief, which he created large and which becomes smaller with time.” **9** The Hebrew word for “labor” might also be translated as “creation” or “production.” **11:** Hosea 4:13; Isaiah 6:13. **14–16:** Literally, “And if grief remains in a heart as at the outset.” **16:** Literally, “From God (*elo-him*).” **20–22:** Numbers 22:24: “like a lane between the vineyards,” which alludes to Balaam, who is about to have his foot crushed against the wall of the lane. **23–24:** Literally, “And my worry runs out.” **26:** Ezekiel 1:24. **31:** Job 5:18. **32–33:** Job 38:9. **36–38:** Literally, “And with the fathers who were righteous and his treasure, may he be counted as treasure.” Exodus 19:5; Ecclesiastes 2:8: “I gathered me also silver and gold and treasure.” Also Ibn Janaah, *Sefer HaShorashim* (Berlin, 1896), p. 333, under “s-g-l.”

#### BEN MISHLE

HaNagid’s collection of Hebrew epigrams, *Ben Mishle* (pronounced MISH-lay), contains 1,197 Hebrew poems. *Ben Mishle* was originally copied and arranged by HaNagid’s youngest son, Eliasaf, who was born in 1049. In 1056, when Eliasaf was six and a half years old, HaNagid instructed him to begin work on the book. (According to Abramson, Eliasaf could read Torah by the age of three and a half.) It is not clear how long it took him to complete the task, though there is some indication that he may have finished before his father died (also in 1056). Along with D. Yarden’s edition, *Ben Mishle* (Jerusalem, 1983), hereafter *BM*, I have also consulted S. Abramson’s, *Ben Mishle*, (Tel Aviv, 1948).

The preface to the book (translated in Cole, *Selected HaNagid*) tells us that many of the poems are taken from other languages and traditions. This was a

common practice at the time and was not considered plagiarism, since the essence of the poem was in the poet's *treatment* of his conventional material. There was, however, engaged consideration of the problem of plagiarism in medieval Arabic and Hebrew literary criticism.

## FIRST WAR

*BM*, #1034; *HaShira*, #42:21. This poem is based on the Arabic epigram attributed to Imru' al-Qa'is (500–42 C.E.): "War [at first] is a beautiful girl urging young men to sign away their lives. As the fire breaks into flames she becomes a headless hag who offers a broken promise and an [unkissable] stinking corpse" (Trans. A. al-Udhari). Andras Hamori cites similar lines by al-Kumayt: "When, after having seemed a delicate young girl, / war shows itself a graying old woman, quarrelsome and shrill . . .," in *The Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, 1974), p. 49.

## I'D SUCK BITTER POISON

*BM*, #58. **Lines 1–2:** Job 20:14–15; Isaiah 11:8. **3–4:** Proverbs 23:6; Deuteronomy 2:28; Numbers 20:19; Proverbs 17:1; 2 Samuel 12:3.

## DELAY YOUR SPEECH

*BM*, #54. **Line 1:** Genesis 24:56. **3:** Proverbs 4:25; Job 5:24. **4:** Job 41:20; 1 Samuel 31:3; 1 Chronicles 10:3. **6:** Judges 20:16; Deuteronomy 8:8. The poem plays on the similarity between *yehtei* (to sin) and *hitta* (wheat). *Berakhot* 61a: "Samuel said: [The evil inclination] is like a kind of wheat [*hitta*], as it says, sin [or deceit, *hattat*] circlet at the door" (Genesis 4:7). This may be in connection with the notion that the forbidden food of which Adam ate was wheat. See *Berakhot* 40a.

## THE RICH

*BM*, #178.

## PEOPLE WELCOME THE RICH

*BM*, #118. **Lines 1–4:** Proverbs 14:20; Ben Sira 13:21–23. **3–4:** Job 34:6.

## IF YOU LEAVE A LONG-LOVED FRIEND

*BM*, #126.

## YOU WHO'D BE WISE

BM, #195. **Lines 1–2:** *Avot* 4:1: “Who is wise? He who learns from every man.” *Be-rakhot* 63b: “R. Ishmael says, One who desires to be wise should occupy himself with money judgments, since no branch of Torah surpasses them, for they are like a perpetual fountain [of instruction].” **3–4:** Proverbs 10:8–9, 11:5.

## WHEN YOU'RE DESPERATE

BM, #198; *HaShira*, #42:3. **Line 1:** Judges 6:6. **6:** Psalms 78:40.

## IT'S HEART THAT DISCERNS

BM, #231. **Line 1:** Kings 3:9. **3:** Proverbs 15:32, 19:8. **5–6:** Jeremiah 1:10. *Megillah* 31b: “R. Simeon b. Eleazar says: If old men say to you, ‘throw down,’ and young men say to you, ‘build up,’ throw down and do not build up, because destruction by old men is construction, and construction by boys is destruction.”

## HE'LL BRING YOU TROUBLE

BM, #632; *HaShira*, #42:7. **Line 1:** Kings 9:11. **2:** Psalms 137:3. **3:** Zechariah 10:2; Ecclesiastes 5:6. **4:** Cf. Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 982b and *Poetics* 24:9), to whom Ibn Ezra refers when he says, “the image [metaphor] is completely false [a lie]” (*The Book of Discussion*, p. 119). The version in HaNagid’s poem plays on the three-word Arabic proverb, “The best of a poem is its falseness” (*ahsan al-shi‘ir akdhabuhu*), which was central to the poetics of the Spanish-Hebrew writers of the period as well. Ibn Ezra refers to this Arabic formulation in 62a and 64a: “The poet is he who most skillfully draws a form that will astonish the eye and yet not have substance.” The English parallel to this, of course, is Shakespeare’s “the truest poetry is the most feigning.” It’s important to keep in mind here that the question is being considered in Aristotelian (epistemological) rather than moral terms.

## COULD KINGS RIGHT A PEOPLE GONE BAD

BM, #382. **Line 1:** Proverbs 4:25; Habakkuk 1:4. **2:** Deuteronomy 32:5; 2 Samuel 23:20. **3:** Numbers 23:27; Ecclesiastes 1:15: “That which is crooked cannot be made straight.” **4:** Lamentations 3:9.

## WHAT'S FAMILIAR IS SOMETIMES DISTANCED

BM, #962. **Line 2:** Ben Sira 13:10: “Do not push forward lest you be repulsed, and do not remain at a distance lest you be forgotten.” **3:** Proverbs 13:13; Leviticus 11:4; Ezekiel 32:13. **4:** Proverbs 20:5.

## ONE WHO WORKS AND BUYS HIMSELF BOOKS

BM, #24. **Line 4:** Ruth 1:21; Deuteronomy 15:13; Nehemiah 5:13; *Pesahim* 4:5 (64a). **6:** Ezekiel 23:14; *Berakhot* 10a; Ezekiel 8:10 (Targum). Cf. Ibn Khaldun's introduction to the study of history, *The Muqaddimah* (trans. N. J. Dawood), chapter 6, section 55: "A person who is ignorant of the composition of speech and its methods, as required by the (Arabic) linguistic habit, and who unsuccessfully attempts to express what he wants to express, is like an invalid who attempts to get up but cannot, because he lacks the power to do so."

## THREE THINGS

BM, #1129; *HaShira*, #42:20. Based on the Arabic of Ibn Hamdun. **Line 1:** *Berakhot* 11a. **2:** 2 Chronicles 17:6. **4:** Isaiah 45:14.

## SOAR, DON'T SETTLE

BM, #1097. **Line 1:** Psalms 57:12; 2 Samuel 18:9; Jeremiah 51:9. **2:** Literally, "soar to the Bear" (i.e., the constellation). **3:** Deuteronomy 31:7; 1 Kings 18:5. **4:** Isaiah 53:4; Job 4:11.

## MAN'S WISDOM IS IN WHAT HE WRITES

BM, #1194; *HaShira*, #42:14. **Line 3:** Esther 5:2–3.

## BEN QOHELET

*Ben Qohelet* contains 411 poems. The poems are presented without a preface, and their editor is unknown. In his introduction to the Oxford edition of HaNagid's diwan (*Diwan Shmu'el HaNagid*, ed. D. S. Sassoon [Oxford, 1934]), Sassoon proposes that HaNagid himself arranged the poems. Habermann suggests it was HaNagid's older son, Yehosef. Abramson (*Ben Qohelet*, ed. S. Abramson [Tel Aviv, 1953], hereafter *BQ*), says that we do not know enough to suggest an editor, and that perhaps the copyist simply omitted the preface at some point. He leans, however, toward HaNagid as the most likely candidate.

Several poems appear in both *Ben Qohelet* and *Ben Tehillim* or *Ben Mishle*, or as parts of poems in those books. The date of the book's completion is not known. Whereas the superscriptions to *Ben Tehillim* often include the date of a given poem, there are neither superscriptions nor dates in the extant manuscripts of *Ben Qohelet*. The first mention of this book in later literature is by Moshe Ibn Ezra in *The Book of Discussion* 32b: "And it [*Ben Qohelet*] is the most sublime and admirable of HaNagid's compositions, and it is more beautiful and more profound than *Ben Tehillim* and *Ben Mishle*, because it was written after its author reached middle age."

## BE GLAD, SHE SAID

BQ, #35; *HaShira*, #41:5. **Lines 8–9:** Cf. HaNagid's contemporary Ibn Hazm (994–1064): "Having seen the hoariness on my temples and sideburns, someone asked me how old I was. I answered him: I consider all my life to have been but a short moment and nothing else" (trans. J. Monroe).

## THE MULTIPLE TROUBLES OF MAN

BQ, #24. See also the later (unfinished) edition by D. Yarden, *Ben Qohelet* (Jerusalem, 1992). **Lines 1–2:** Exodus 18:8; Psalms 71:20; *Hagigah* 5b. The Hebrew has *betzarot* ("in trouble" or "in pain"); Abramson suggests *ketzarot* ("like troubles" or "like pain"), which I have followed. **3:** Genesis 43:33.

## GAZING THROUGH THE NIGHT

BQ, #22; *HaShira*, #41:22. This poem appears in both *Ben Qohelet* and *Ben Tehillim*. In the latter it is incorporated into a poem of friendship that begins: "It's upon you, sons and supporters of the Law, it's upon you to reveal its secrets, because humankind upon earth is in darkness, and you are its sun." **Lines 1–5:** Psalms 8:4; Psalms 104:24; *Berakhot* 10a: "He came out into the open air [of the world] and looked upon the stars and constellations and broke into song." **3–4:** Literally, "the earth and its creeping things." Genesis 1:25–26: "every thing that creepeth upon the ground." Rashi's annotation to Genesis 1:25 reads: "It [*remes*] means creeping swarms that creep low upon the ground; they appear as though they are dragged along, for how they move is not discernible." Genesis 6:7: "Man and beast and creeping things, and fowl of the air." Also, Ibn Hazm: "If I should come to possess [love], then all the earth will [seem like] a senile camel and mankind motes of dust, while the land's inhabitants will [seem like] insects" (trans. J. Monroe). **8:** Isaiah 40:22; *Baraita de Shmu'el HaQatan* 1: "The heavens are made like a tent." **9:** Exodus 26:4ff., which describes the sanctuary in the desert: "And thou shalt make loops of blue upon the edge of the one curtain"; *Shabbat* 99a: "the clasps in the loops looked like stars set in the sky." Similar images abound in Arabic poetry. **10:** Psalms 8:4, as above, lines 1–5. **11–13:** Ibn Gabirol, "KeShoresh Etz" (*Shirei HaHol*, Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, ed. Brody and Schirmann, [Jerusalem, 1974] #203); "The Tree," in Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 100–103: "He scatters his stars about like a shepherd, / sending his flock across a field." This is also a common image in Arabic poetry. **14–15:** Jeremiah 10:13; Proverbs 25:14. Schirmann reads "clouds"; Yarden, "clouds carried by wind." The biblical reference alludes to "vapors." Ibn al-Mu'tazz compares the moon to a ship of silver loaded with amber incense; other poets use the image of a ship as well. **19–21:** Isaiah 18:4. "Shaking water": the Hebrew plays on the root *n-a-r*—*na'ara tena'air* (a girl [*na'ara*] will shake out [*tena'air*])—then alludes to Song of Songs 5:2: "For my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." I have taken several

liberties here to establish a similar weave in the English. **22:** Some versions of the text have two extra lines here. See *BT*, #41. Isaiah 18:3. **24:** The Hebrew (*hayyah*) is in dispute, and Abramson discusses the matter in his notes to *Ben Qohelet*. Both he and Yarden read “troops,” alluding to 2 Samuel 23:13. The word might also mean “beast.” Schirmann does not comment here. A literal version of the entire passage would read: “And dwellers on earth are like beasts falling off to sleep [or troops pitching camp for a night], our yards/courts their stalls.” **27:** *Mekhilta beShalah* 3: 86, line 86: “To what can the Israelites at that moment be compared? To a dove fleeing from a hawk.” **28–29:** Isaiah 30:14: “And He shall break it as a potter’s vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing; so that there shall not be found among the pieces thereof a shard”; 2 Kings 21:13: “And I will wipe Jerusalem, as a man wipeth a dish”; *Baba Batra* 16a: “Raba said: Job sought to turn the dish upside down [to declare all God’s works worthless]”; *Pesahim* 50a: “Rabbi Joseph the son of R. Joshua b. Levi became ill and fell into a trance. When he recovered, his father asked him, ‘What did you see?’ ‘I saw a topsy-turvy world, the upper [class] was underneath and the lower on top.’ ‘My son,’ he observed, ‘you saw a clear world.’” The image of the broken plate is common in Arabic poetry, e.g.: “Death will smash us into pieces as though we were glass” (Abu al-‘Ala al-Ma‘arri).

#### EARTH TO MAN

*BQ*, #38. **Line 2:** Jeremiah 37:4, 52:31. Al-Ma‘arri: “We’re surrounded by a place from which escape is impossible, and time is running out on its souls [residents].”

#### THE CHILD AT ONE OR TWO

*BQ*, #79; *HaShira*, #41:7. A classic “stages of life” text. *Avot* 5:1: “He would say: At five to [the study of] Scripture, ten to Mishna, thirteen to the commandments, fifteen to Talmud, eighteen to the [wedding] canopy, twenty to pursuit [of a livelihood], thirty to [fullness of] strength, forty to understanding, fifty to counsel, sixty to old age [maturity], seventy to grey hair, eighty to extended strength, ninety to [a] bending [figure]. At one hundred he is as though he were dead, and had passed away and faded from the world.” Cf. *As You Like It*, act 2, scene 7: “All the world’s a stage” and the seven ages of man. **Line 2:** Jeremiah 8:17; *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:4: “R. Samuel b. R. Isaac taught in the name of R. Samuel b. Eleazar: The seven ‘vanities’ mentioned by Qoheleth correspond to the seven worlds a man beholds. At one year old he is like a king seated in a canopied litter, fondled and kissed by all. At two and three he is like a pig, sticking his hand in the gutters. At ten he skips like a kid. At twenty he is like a neighing horse, adorning his person and longing for a wife. Having married, he is like an ass. When he has begotten children, he grows brazen like a dog to supply their food and wants. When he has become old, he is [bent] like an ape.” **3–4:** Song of Songs 2:8. **7:** Ecclesiastes 11:10. **9:** Literally, “he becomes righteous (blameless) and joins his

friends the elders,” i.e., he matures and comes to completion of character. Psalms 18:26. **13–14:** Job 24:17. **15–16:** Genesis 48:10. Abramson notes that the manuscript here is hard to decipher and he reads *nireh* (seems/appears) rather than *nikheh* (broken as in Psalms 109:16). **17–18:** Job 18:10; Hosea 9:8; Psalms 91:3, 124:7. **20:** Literally, “He won’t know the harvest [season] from the ploughing [season].” Genesis 45:6. **22:** *Pesahim* 72b: “All your words are . . . naught but mysteries.” **23–24:** Literally, “And at a hundred he is brother to the worm, repulsive to people, his raiment stained.” Isaiah 14:19.

#### I QUARTERED THE TROOPS FOR THE NIGHT

BQ, #131; *HaShira*, #41:8. Cf. Latin poetry’s *ubi sunt*, especially the twelfth-century poem by Bernard of Morlay: “Where now is your glory, Babylon, where is the terrible Nebuchadnezzar, and strong Darius and the famous Cyrus? Where now is Regulus, or where Romulus, or where Remus?” (For more on the *ubi sunt* tradition and excerpt of Bernard’s poem, see Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. R. J. Payton and U. Mammitzsch (Chicago, 1996), pp. 156ff. Or Villon’s “Where are the snows of yesteryear?” in his “Testament.” Helen Waddell comments: “The [Latin] hymn of the great age, 1150 to 1250, has secret springs, and scholars have made a good, if non-proven case for Celtic and Arabic” (*Medieval Latin Lyrics*, trans. H. Waddell [Harmondsworth, 1952], p. 7). **Lines 5–7:** Genesis 4:9. **9–10:** *Shabbat* 114a. **20:** In the original “these sleepers” is “these crowds” or “these masses,” which I understand as referring both to HaNagid’s own troops and to the “masters” who “slept on.”

#### LUXURIES EASE

BQ, #210. **Lines 1–2:** Ecclesiastes 5:12. **3:** Isaiah 52:7; Song of Songs 1:10; 1 Kings 10:22. **4:** Isaiah 17:13 and *Kalila and Dimna*, a fourth-century C.E. Indian cycle of fables which was available to HaNagid in an Arabic translation. The cycle was translated into Hebrew in the twelfth century: “For like it was the male of the peacock which, when it was pursued by a hunter, grew weary from the weight of its tail and was snared; and the weight of its tail was its misfortune and sorrow. Riches kept by its owner thereof to his hurt.”

#### WHY REPEAT THE SINS

BQ, #144. **Line 2:** Psalms 78:40. **6:** Genesis 8:3.

#### AT THE TREASURY

BQ, #296. Cf. The Arabic of Dik al-Jinn al-Himsi (d. circa 850): “Time watches people in their sleep/A thief waiting for his chance” (trans. A. al-Udhari, in

*Fireflies in the Dark* (London, 1934). **Line 1:** Amos 6:4. **2:** Song of Songs 2:9. **4:** Exodus 22:1.

#### KNOW OF THE LIMBS

BQ, #365. **Line 1:** Ezekiel 37:6. The Hebrew of lines 1–4 sets up a weave that links *atzamot* (bones), *ha'rekumot* (embroidered, decorated), *krumot* (covered), and *atzumot* (powerful, great) on the one hand, with *efer* (ash) and *'afar* (dust) on the other. I have tried to work this play into the English with the cross-weave of “know” and “bone,” “limbs” and “skin,” “dust” and “reduced,” “power” and “powder.”

#### YOU MOCK ME NOW

BQ, #388. **Lines 3–4:** *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* 26:9: “Many a young ass has died and had its skin turned into saddlecloths for its dam’s back.” Also, *Sanhedrin* 52a: “Moses and Aaron once walked along, with Nadab and Abihu behind them, and all Israel following in the rear. Then Nadab said to Abihu, ‘Oh that these old men might die, so that you and I should be the leaders of our generation.’ But the Holy One, blessed be He, said unto them: ‘We shall see who will bury whom.’ R. Papa said: Thus men say: ‘Many an old camel is laden with the hides of the young.’”

#### TIME DEFIES AND BETRAYS

BQ, #169. **Line 1:** Deuteronomy 21:8. **2:** Literally, “haughty and proud.” Numbers 32:13. **3:** Literally, “lengthens the wandering of the separated.” **4:** Literally, “and it comes between twins as between north and south.”

#### THE MARKET

BQ, #314; *HaShira*, #41:9. Several poems in the diwan begin like this one and employ the same form and locutions. The Hebrew end rhyme (and often the internal rhyme at the hemistich) throughout the poem is on the syllable *dahm*, which by itself means “blood.” **Line 1:** *Hullin* 9a: “Rab Judah stated in the name of Samuel, one may not eat of the slaughtering of any butcher who does not know the rules of *shehita* (ritual slaughter).” **3–4:** Literally, “and fatlings [or beasts] as many as the fish of the sea, and much poultry, their day of great fear come.” Ezekiel 47:10; Jeremiah 46:21: “Their day of calamity was come upon them.” **5:** Exodus 15:8. **23–24:** The texture and weave of these extremely slippery lines is wonderfully complex and in many respects misleading, in a sense epitomizing the aural and thematic effects of the poem as a whole. The Hebrew sounds like this: *lo nimtza et lo met bo met o et lo yolid molidahm*, which would translate literally

as “there is never found a time in which a dead [or mortal] thing didn’t die, or a time that does not give birth to those that bear them.” In other words, as with beasts, so with people: they are being born and dying all the time, and at the same time. At first it appears that HaNagid is talking about people, but in fact he is still talking about the beasts of the previous lines, which are likened to people. (See Elitzur, *Shirat HaHol*, pp. 235–40.) **28:** Ecclesiastes 12:13. Translations of the line in the biblical text vary from “This is the whole duty of man” to “This is the end of man” to “This is the whole person” to “For this applies to all mankind.” “This” refers to “keeping the commandments,” though HaNagid angles the verse at the preceding lines of his own poem, which liken this world to the bustling market and allude to Ecclesiastes 3:19–21: “Man has no pre-eminence over a beast, for all is vanity.” Avraham Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Ecclesiastes (which postdates HaNagid by nearly a century) resembles HaNagid’s approach in this poem.

#### YOSEF IBN HASDAI

The poet’s son is also of interest, since he served as a high-ranking vizier under three Saragossan rulers and became an accomplished poet in Arabic. He may have converted to Islam.

#### THE QASIDA

*HaShira*, #54; *BT*, #51\*. HaNagid replies in a similarly lavish poem (*BT* #51, not translated here) that he will take care of the refugees, whom he refers to as the poet’s nephews. **Lines 1–11:** The first part of the qasida, the erotic prelude, has often been treated as a wholly independent unit by poets and critics. Recent scholars, especially of Arabic poetry, have put forth more integrated (and more persuasive) theories of the qasida, demonstrating how its seemingly autonomous parts interact—though, again, this shouldn’t imply an identification of addressees in the various sections of the poem. See, for example, J. Meisami, *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Poetry* (London, 2003), pp. 13–14, and *Persian Court Poetry*, pp. 30–39; J. Stetkevych, “Arabic Poetry and Assorted Poetics,” in *Islamic Studies: A Tradition and Its Problems*, ed. M. Kerr (Malibu, 1980), pp. 103–23; M. Sells, “The Qasida and the West: Self-Reflective Stereotype and Critical Encounter,” *Al-‘Arabiyya* 20 (1987): 305–57; S. Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak* (Ithaca, 1993), pp. 3ff. **2:** Psalms 104:2. **3–4:** Micah 1:6; Jeremiah 26:18. **7–8:** The figure of the fawn (the young man) is, as Ezra Fleischer notes, subtly developed here and restored to its original meaning—a wild animal—through the metaphor of the snare. It is this sort of subtle linkage, says Fleischer, that, along with the powerfully sensual opening and transition, won the hearts of Ibn Hasdai’s contemporaries and makes the poem one of the

period's finest. **21–24:** Fleischer rightly calls this transition—in which a dream leaves behind it a palpable fragrance, which is felt in the texture of the verse itself—“a tour de force.” The passage to the body of the poem is enacted by means of the *takhallus* (the transition), i.e., line 23, in which a distant scriptural association (Song of Songs 1:3: “Thy name is as ointment poured forth”) links the subject’s name and reputation with a pleasant fragrance’s effect on those whom it reaches. Again, the poem’s energy is modulated and transformed through the rhetorical device, or “ornament,” though the allusion does not involve direct quotation. Also Song of Songs 5:5. **26:** 2 Samuel 23:1. **29–30:** That is, Samuel the prophet, of Scripture. This second and main part of the poem comprises the “ode” itself—praise of its recipient and the values he embodies. In keeping with the polythematic nature of the *qasida*, however, numerous subjects and themes are treated within the ode. This poem takes up—in addition to the eroticism of the opening and the encomium of the body of the poem—description (of the pen), friendship, and, a final “message.” The lines involve an elaborate return through allusion to the association of fragrance and Scripture, on a literal level, in order to praise HaNagid hyperbolically. **31–32:** Isaiah 47:9; Daniel 12:12 (NJPS): “arise to your destiny [at the end of days].” **37–38:** Job 29:3; 31:26. **39–40:** Isaiah 8:16: “Bind up the testimony”; 9:5: “and the government is upon his shoulder.” **49–50:** I.e., when my soul was actively engaged with yours, I was happy; when all I have left is the memory of that love, I am empty and like a desert landscape. **61:** Riding the hand or fingers, i.e., writing; when it’s lying flat, unused, it’s worthless. Ibn Hasdai is most likely alluding to the importance of writing in HaNagid’s rise to power and glory, and of course to his talent as a poet. **63:** Two teeth—the nib, which is usually forked; its spit—the ink. **67:** Yehosef is HaNagid’s son, who later replaced him as the prime minister of Granada. Genesis 49:22. **70:** Genesis 41:45: “Pharaoh then gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah” [Egyptian for “God speaks; he lives” or “creator of life”]. Literally, “[for] one who solves all hidden things.” **71:** HaNagid was a Levite, a descendant of Qehat (Numbers 3:17). **73:** *Avot* 5:24: “At ten [one is ready for] Mishna.” **75–76:** Jeremiah 2:3. The priestly portion is the portion of the harvest reserved for the high priest. Yehosef is likened to the best portion given to God. **77:** I.e., I’m prepared to do anything for him, even die. **79–98:** While technically part of the body of the ode, this “conclusion” or “message” might be understood as an echo of the pre-Islamic *qasida*. **85–86:** “Intended” as in both “betrothed” and “addressed.” In the medieval intellectual context, “virgin,” referring to a poem or its ideas, means new or original. “Orphaned,” as explained above, also indicates a unique status. Literally, “though it has a father, it is an orphan (*yetoma*),” i.e., unique. **88–92:** Two brothers: apparently refugees. **90:** Literally, “whose lands lie, like Admah, in ruin.” Admah is a biblical land laid waste (Deuteronomy 29:22; Hosea 11:8). **94:** Schirmann says this refers to the heads of the *yeshiva* in Granada, i.e., the city’s scholars, who are physically far from the poet, but close to his heart. **98:** I.e., the congregation of Israel (the phrase in the Hebrew is feminine).

## SHELOMO IBN GABIROL

As with Shmu'el HaNagid and Todros Abulafia, the discovery of the poet's work seems to partake of the "miracle" Goitein invokes in his description of the entire period (see introduction). For while many of his liturgical poems were preserved in prayer books and recited as part of the daily and festival liturgies throughout the Jewish world, the nonliturgical poems were harder to come by and clearly not in great demand. Nor—prior to the discovery of the Cairo Geniza and its scrap heap of Scripture, scrolls, shopping lists, recipes, letters, and assorted literary gems—was there any mention of there ever having been a complete diwan of Ibn Gabirol's poems. That we have a full selection of the poet's work is only thanks to the stubborn devotion of Iraqi-Jewish poet David Zemach—who, in the 1920s, discovered the manuscript containing Ibn Gabirol's "collected poems" beside a fireplace in northern Iraq, where it was about to become fuel for the week's laundry—and the great modern Hebrew part Haim Nahman Bialik, who assembled an edition of Ibn Gabirol's poems from manuscripts scattered in libraries throughout Europe and North America. (See Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 9–11.) I have consulted Yarden's edition of the secular poems, *Shirei HaHol leR. Shelomo Ibn Gabirol* (Jerusalem, 1984), hereafter *SH*, and his edition of the liturgical poems, *Shirei HaQodesh leR. Shelomo Ibn Gabirol* (Jerusalem, 1971/72), hereafter *SQ*, as well as *Shelomo Ibn Gabirol: Shirei HaHol*, ed. H. Brody and H. Schirmann (Jerusalem, 1974), hereafter Brody-Schirmann, and *Shirei Shelomo Ben Yehuda Ibn Gabirol*, vols. 1–6, ed. H. N. Bialik and Y. Ravnitzky (Tel Aviv, 1928–30), hereafter Bialik-Ravnitzky.

## TRUTH SEEKERS TURN

*SH*, #108. Added by a later editor or copyist, the Arabic heading reads: "A poem about one who doesn't know the craft of poetry." **Line 1:** The Hebrew has "poem," singular, and might also be understood collectively as "song." **2:** Psalms 94:8. **5:** Deuteronomy 32:47: "For it is no vain thing for you; because it is your life," and Isaiah 30:7. **7–9:** "Kills the soul", i.e., it destroys him. The line alludes to the frequently anthologized lines of the Arabic poet Di'ibel Ibn 'Ali, "the devil of poets," quoted in Ibn Ezra's *Book of Discussion* 47a: "The bad poem will die before its author, whereas the good poem will live even if its speaker dies." **10:** Exodus 12:2. The Hebrew calendar is lunar, hence the prominence of the moon in the regulation of the social and natural order. According to *Sanhedrin* 42a, "Whoever pronounces the benediction over the new moon in its due time welcomes, as it were, the presence of the *Shekhina*" (the feminine aspect of the divine).

## I'M PRINCE TO THE POEM

*SH*, #109; *HaShira*, #61. Written when the poet was sixteen. By then Ibn Gabirol had already written poems to Shmu'el HaNagid in Granada and been commissioned to

write four elegies for Hai Gaon, the great Eastern rabbi and head of the academy in Pumbedita. **Line 1:** There are two variant readings for “prince”—“singer” and “song”—and Schirmann uses all three at different points in his career. Ecclesiastes 10:7, Proverbs 19:10, Esther 1:3 (NJPS), 2 Samuel 19:7. **2:** The instrument in the Hebrew is *kinnor*, indicating, generally, “a string instrument played by hand,” probably a lute or a kind of lyre or small harp. 1 Samuel 16:16 (NJPS); 1 Samuel 16:23; Psalms 68:26. **3:** 2 Samuel 12:30. **5:** Literally, “Here I am,” which echoes the young Samuel’s reply to God, when he is called to prophecy. Samuel 3:4, 8. **6:** The English image departs some from the Hebrew, for which there are two variant versions. Schirmann reads: “My heart understands (*ban*) like the heart of [a man of] eighty,” or “my heart is like eighty with wisdom.” Yarden has: “My heart within me (*bi*) is like the heart of [a man of] eighty.” The Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* 7:4: “And they went on to appoint Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah to the Yeshiva at the age of 16 and his head was covered with silver.” Also, the Haggadah: “R. Elazar ben Azariah said: ‘Lo, I am like a man of seventy.’”

PROLOGUE TO *THE BOOK OF GRAMMAR*

*SH*, #226. Drawn from Ibn Gabirol’s *Sefer Ha’Anaq*, a long poem about Hebrew grammar that the poet wrote when he was nineteen. All that remains of the poem is the prologue (the beginning of which is translated here) and the first forty lines of the book itself. The prologue follows an *alef-bet* acrostic, duplicated in the translation, with the final three letters of the English (though not the Hebrew) set off in a triplet at the end. The Hebrew breaks the acrostic at one point, and the English follows suit. **Line 1:** Psalms 68:35 and 96:6. **2:** Isaiah 40:12. **3:** Isaiah 59:19; Exodus 4:11. **4:** Song of Songs 3:11. **5–6:** I.e., God gave man language and the power of speech, along with the crown of honor (the soul), which lead to our knowledge of God’s remarkable work in this world and the next. Ecclesiastes 12:9; Isaiah 40:14. **6:** Job 37:14. **7:** *Hullin* 60b, where “the Small” is added to a man’s name to indicate humility. Ibn Gabirol called himself Shelomo HaQatan, Solomon the Small (i.e., this Lesser, or Younger). **9:** Numbers 27:17. **10:** 2 Kings 30:6: “and the remnant that is escaped.” **11:** Cf. Sa’adia Gaon’s introduction to *Sefer HaEgron*, lines 27–44, ed. N. Aloni (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 158ff., where Sa’adia tells of Israel’s exile. The Jews, he says, spoke “Ashdodi,” Greek, and the languages of Persia and Egypt, but not the holy tongue. Ashdod was a Philistine town on the Mediterranean coast of biblical Palestine, today the Israeli town of the same name, between Gaza and Jaffa. **12:** Isaiah 59:16. **13–14:** Nehemiah 13:24; Job 19:13. **15–16:** “Edom” in the world of Andalusian Hebrew poetry is Rome. “Edomite” in this case is probably the Romance precursor to Spanish. “The tongue of Qedar” is Arabic. Song of Songs 1:5; Isaiah 21:16. **17:** Literally, “in the enclosures of their heart sinking into the depths of the abyss.” **18:** Literally, “sinking like lead.” Exodus 15:10. **19–20:** Jeremiah 45:3 and 20:9. **21–22:** Jeremiah 48:36; Isaiah 16:11. The Hebrew plays on the root *k-n-r* in *kinnor* (harp) and *yam kinneret*

(the Sea of Galilee, or the harp-shaped sea). **23–24:** Literally, “They didn’t know prophecy [the books of the Prophets] or the Book [Torah], or how to read a letter or scholarly composition.” Isaiah 29:11–12. **25–26:** Exodus 15:4; Jonah 1:13: “The men rowed hard to bring it to the land, but they could not.” **27–28:** Isaiah 42:7 **29–30:** Exodus 4:11; Psalms 63:12, 38:14; Ruth 2:12. **31–32:** Job 32:6; Isaiah 51:20; Deuteronomy 28:20. **33:** Deuteronomy 30:17; Job 4:12–16. **34:** Proverbs 8:1–3. **36:** Psalms 119:173. **37–38:** Literally, “Get up and do not say, I am only a youth.” Jeremiah 1:5–7: “I have appointed thee as a prophet unto the nations [said the Lord]. Then said I: ‘Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; for I am a child.’ But the Lord said unto me: Say not: I am a child”; Job 32:9. **39–40:** Literally, “My horn was exalted.” 1 Samuel 2:1; Genesis 24:50. **41:** Ecclesiastes 2:3. A *xyst* (pronounced *zist*) was, in ancient Rome, a garden walk lined with trees. It prefigures images in the poem’s second section (not translated), where Ibn Gabirol describes his *‘Anaq* as a garden full of myrtle, roses, and tall trees (lines 30–31 in Yarden). It also points ahead to the extended and highly charged descriptions of gardens later in the *diwan*. “In Spain,” says James Dickie, who has written extensively on gardens and garden architecture in Andalusia, “one can never get very far away from Ancient Rome.” (*The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. S. Jayyusi [Leiden, 1994], p. 1024). **42:** The “language of Cain” is, literally, “the holy tongue”; I’ve sought to avoid the repetition of the phrase (from line 8) and freely interpolated this epithet. It was generally believed in the medieval world that Hebrew was the language given to Adam.

#### THEY ASKED ME AS THOUGH THEY WERE MYSTIFIED

*SH*, #51. **Line 1:** “Like clouds,” i.e., like clouds that bestow rain generously over the land. **3:** Isaiah 14:17. **4:** Exodus 35:22; Jeremiah 11:22. In medieval Arabic poetry, the liberal man is likened to clouds, rain, and rivers.

#### SEE THE SUN

*SH*, #158; *HaShira*, #68. An elegy for the poet’s patron Yequti’el, who was murdered by rivals at the Saragossan court in 1039, at the age of ninety-nine. The loss was catastrophic for Ibn Gabirol, who had little means of his own and had held Yequti’el in the highest esteem. This is one of his more famous short poems, distinctive in part for its merging of a private sensation of loss with a larger, cosmic response to that loss. **Line 1:** Genesis 27:27. **2:** Isaiah 1:18. The Hebrew word for “crimson” is *tola’a*, which also means a worm, from which a red dye was made. Crimson, then, carries overtones of Yequti’el’s glory, of the blood shed in his murder, and of the worms that “eat through the shrouds” of the dead in the earth. Also Isaiah 14:11: “Thy pomp is brought down to the nether-world; and the noise of thy psalteries: The maggot is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee (*oomekhasekha tolei’ah*).” **3:** The Hebrew verb employed here (*tifashet*) is used in Scripture only with regard to the dead. 1 Samuel 31:8; 2 Samuel 23:10. For

“edges,” see Numbers 35:5, 24:17. **4:** Daniel 8:8. **6:** Isaiah 16:3; Psalms 91:1, 36:8. “And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings.” **7:** The progression of colors is often central to the effect of Ibn Gabirol’s poetry: here the movement is from implied daylight to red to violet to grayish black. Isaiah 50:3; Jeremiah 4:28. **8:** 2 Kings 19:1.

#### ON LEAVING SARAGOSSA

*SH*, #111; *HaShira*, #74. The Arabic heading reads: “Another of his poems, from the time he was leaving Saragossa.” While the poet at first appears to be emotionally out of control, in fact the poem is cunningly built through a series of paradoxes and mirroring devices that lend it a particular brilliance. The shift from self-praise or boasting (*fakhr*) to mockery of others is characteristic of the poet’s Arabic models. It is also one of the many binary oppositions that characterize his work. **Lines 1–2:** Psalms 69:4; Lamentations 4:4; Psalms 137:6. **3–4:** Psalms 38:11; Deuteronomy 26:14. **5–6:** Psalms 132:4. **7–8:** Job 6:11; Psalms 79:5, 89:47. **9–10:** Jeremiah 6:10. **11–12:** Lamentations 1:21; Psalms 73:23. **13–14:** Psalms 142:3, 62:9; Numbers 23:13. **15–16:** Job 32:20; *Yoma* 75a. **17–18:** Psalms 122:6; Isaiah 60:5; Psalms 65:8. **19–20:** Zechariah 7:12; Isaiah 74:4. **23–24:** Numbers 16:9; Jonah 4:11. **25–26:** 1 Kings 2:34: “He was buried in his own house in the wilderness”—there is an internal rhyme of *niqbar* (buried) and *midbar* (wilderness, desert), with *midbar* also being a common term in medieval discourse for a graveyard. **27–28:** Psalms 69:30, 25:16, and 119:141: “I am small and despised.” **29–30:** A play of roots in the Hebrew between *re’a* (friend) and *ra’ayoni* (my idea) leads into the complex patterning of the entire poem: the poet longs for a friend and finds only his mind; in his mind is wisdom. By wearing away his existence (his body) he can come closer to the object of his desire (wisdom and friend), whom he finally finds in himself-not-himself, Solomon the elder (of Ecclesiastes’ wisdom literature), not Solomon the Younger, or the Small (see “Prologue to *The Book of Grammar*,” note to line 7). **31–32:** Psalms 102:10, 90:6. The mingling of blood and tears is a standard image in Arabic poetry. **33–34:** Ezekiel 5:12. **35–36:** *Yebamot* 112a: “Three [classes] of women must be divorced. . . . One who declares . . . ‘Heaven is between me and you’”; Nehemiah 9:6. **37–38:** Genesis 23:4; Job 30:29; Lamentations 4:3, a verse that is followed by the allusion of line 1: “The tongue of the suckling cleaves.” **39–40:** Proverbs 26:12. **41–42:** Jeremiah 8:14; Job 20:16. **43–44:** Jeremiah 9:7; Genesis 43:20: “If you please, my Lord, said [Joseph’s brothers]” (NJPS). **45–46:** Job 30:1. **47–48:** Isaiah 1:18. **49–50:** The verse here involves a characteristic reversal of the terms involved in the scriptural allusion to Numbers 15:33: “And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of ‘Anak [the giant], and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers and so we were in their sight.” **51–52:** Literally, “When I take up my parables [or images] they quarrel.” Job 27:1; Joel 4:6–8. **53–54:** Literally, “this language [of yours] is the language of Ashqelon”—a non-Hebrew coastal city in Scripture, near Ashdod, likewise non-Israelite. Joshua 13:3; Nehemiah 13:24. Jeremiah

5:15; 2 Kings 18:25. See “Prologue to the Book of Grammar,” note to line 11. **55–56:** The Hebrew of line 56 involves another of the poem’s striking internal rhymes (see note to lines 25–26, 97–98, and 101–2): *qilshoni* (my pitchfork) *leshoni* ([is] my tongue/language). 2 Samuel 22:42; Psalms 64:4; Jeremiah 9:7. Expressing this sort of contempt for one’s rivals and other people in general, in the context of self-praise, is a rhetorical strategy taken over from Arabic poetry, though, again, it seems particularly suited to Ibn Gabirol. **57–58:** Jeremiah 6:10; Hosea 10:3. **59–60:** The primary allusion is to Judges 8:21: “And Gideon arose . . . and took the crescents that were on their camels’ necks.” But the camels in the poem may also be associated with the Arabic pre-Islamic *qasida*, in which these noblest of animals take the poet/hero across the desert (see lines 25–26). There the camels are contrasted to the other animals also alluded to in the early *qasidas*; here the other “animals” are the people—snakes, oxen, ostriches, creatures lower than dogs, and so on. **61–64:** Job 29:23: “And they opened their mouths wide as for the latter [spring] rain.”—“Latter rain”—in the Hebrew, *malqosh*—echoes the pitchfork (*qilshoni*) of lines 55–56. Also Exodus 30:23. **65–66:** *Nega’aim* 12:6; Psalms 120:5. **67–68:** Hosea 4:1; Proverbs 2:5; Deuteronomy 18:11; Leviticus 20:27. **69–70:** Micah 1:8; Jeremiah 4:8; Joel 1:13. **71–72:** Isaiah 58:5; *Ta’anit* 2:9: “The first three fasts are on Monday, Thursday, and Monday.” **73–74:** Ecclesiastes 9:4. **75–76:** Zechariah 4:10. **77–78:** Jonah 4:3; Psalms 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” **79–80:** Proverbs 7:25; Job 31:33. **81–82:** Psalms 7:17, 35:13. **83–84:** Habakkuk 2:16. **87–88:** Ruth 4:1. The constellation referred to specifically is the Great Bear (the sons of the bear). **89–90:** Genesis 27:40. **91–92:** Hosea 14:9; Deuteronomy 28:28. It isn’t clear whether “blindness” is being used metaphorically or refers to an extension of Ibn Gabirol’s illness. **93–94:** Job 7:15; Psalms 71:3. **95–96:** Genesis 27:46. **97–98:** Another instance of the conspicuous word play referred to above. This time the two terms involved are *sesoni* (my joy) and *asoni* (my downfall or disaster, i.e., death), which is then reversed in the following hemistich. The English resorts to a more conspicuous alliteration. **99–100:** Ecclesiastes 2:21; Proverbs 5:11; Psalms 71:9. **101–2:** Yet another two conspicuous consonant shifts, the former appearing at least two other times in Ibn Gabirol’s diwan, and once in HaNagid. In line 101 the terms are *anaha* (sigh) and *hanaha* (repose/rest/assumption); in 102 *rezoni* (my leanness—from his asceticism or perhaps his illness) and *mezoni* (my food, nourishment—implying spiritual nourishment and/or the world to come). **103–4:** Ecclesiastes 1:13; Proverbs 2:3–5: “Yea, if thou call for understanding, lift up thy voice for discernment; if thou seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” **105–6:** Job 12:22; Psalms 119:18. **107–8:** Ecclesiastes 2:10: “This was my portion from all my labor.”

MY HEART THINKS AS THE SUN COMES UP

SH, #193. **Line 1:** Isaiah 10:7. **4:** Genesis 38:18; Exodus 22:25.

## NOW THE THRUSHES

SH, #199. **Lines 1–2:** The Hebrew has a general term for “songbirds,” drawn from Isaiah, *benot ‘agur*. “Thrush” picks up on that bird’s distinction for song, as the prosody of the translation enfolds an homage to Hardy and his sense of the line. Isaiah 13:21; Isaiah 38:14; Psalms 48:5: “For, lo, the kings assembled themselves”; Ezekiel 17:6; Jeremiah 31:18. The gist of the Hebrew is that the birds sing naturally, without having been taught. The implicit contrast is with the court singers and, by extension, the poets who would likely be in attendance at the garden gatherings. **3–4:** It’s natural for birds to sing and men to drink, though the learned among the latter need some coaxing. Song of Songs 6:11; Exodus 18:9. **5–6:** Zechariah 9:18. **7–8:** The natural (untaught) approaches the courtly (taught), and the circle comes round. *Genesis Rabbah* 13:2: “All the shrubs of the field and trees were as though speaking to one another.” See also L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1925/53), 2:60–61: “Hippolytus . . . explicitly states . . . that according to the Jewish view ‘all things in creation are endowed with sensation, and that there is nothing inanimate’”; Exodus 12:27: “And the people bowed the head and worshipped”; 1 Kings 22:24: “Which way went the spirit [*ruah*, which also means ‘wind’] of the Lord from me to speak?”; Psalms 103:16: “For a wind passeth over it, and it is gone”; Numbers 5:14; Job 37:21.

## WINTER WITH ITS INK

SH, #189; *HaShira*, #79. **Line 1:** The tight musical weave of the Hebrew throughout the poem, but especially at the start, matches the look of the letter and the garden. Winter implies the Mediterranean rainy season, as in Song of Songs 2:11: “For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over.” Generally it can be taken to refer to the months October–March. See Targum Onqelos to Genesis 8:22; Psalms 72:6; also *Pirqei Rabbi Eliezer* 5:23: “But when the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to bless the growth of the earth . . . he opened his treasure of good in the heavens and sent down rain to the earth; these rains were masculine waters and the earth immediately conceived, as a bride is made pregnant by her first husband. There grew there the seeds of blessing.” **2:** I.e., as the lightning comes through the clouds, the pen runs through (is held in) the palm or hand. Psalms 45:2: “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” **5–8:** The vocabulary of craft-work is drawn from accounts in Exodus of the building of the tabernacle by Bezalel. Also 2 Chronicles 26:15. **5–6:** 1 Samuel 2:3. **7:** Scheindlin reads *hamda* as “longed for,” though he notes that most editors explain that the word in this context meant “envied.” “Longed for” (as in “coveted”) seems to me to convey the more complicated overtones of *hamda*, which implies both envy and desire, and maintains the erotic elements of the personification. **8:** Literally, “like its (the sky’s) [or his] stars.” The larger harmony between the heavens and the earth exists in the mind, or in the art, of the poet, who likens the flowers to stars and seeks an explanation for the correspondence he senses. Other writers have suggested a

slightly different, but convincing reading, in which the sky (male) writes a love letter to the earth (female) with its rain. In response to the calligraphy of the sky, the earth embroiders a message of longing along its furrows, reflecting or representing the stars. Regardless of how one reads it, the central dynamic is between upper world and lower world, and the so-called ornamental arts are central to its equation. (For more on the role and nature of ornament in this poetry, see the introduction to this volume, note 66 and the text: for more on the image of the primal calligrapher, and the calligraphed manuscript–garden comparison in poetry, see A. Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*, (New York, 1984), p. 4 and pp. 121–23.)

#### THE GARDEN

SH #181. While this poem is classified by Yarden as a descriptive nature poem, Ibn Gabirol characteristically transcends the limits of the convention, as the poem also powerfully embodies the poetics of *badii'a*, which Ibn Qutayba says “makes meanings subtle and speech delicate” (Adonis, *Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham [Austin, 1990], p. 50). For more on *badii'a*, see the glossary at the end of this anthology.

The heading to the poem in Brody-Schirmann reads: “In which the various ornaments (*badii'a*) are employed in the supplest fashion, with power and originality; a poem that describes the garden beds and the changing conditions of the sun in relation to them.” **Line 1:** Song of Songs 5:2; Exodus 16:8: “The floods stood upright as a heap”—Ibn Gabirol uses the scriptural figure from Moses’ “Song of the Sea” (celebrating deliverance from Israel’s Egyptian oppressors) to describe the miraculous solid state of the water; Scripture refers to “floods,” Ibn Gabirol to “dew”; Psalms 33:7. **2:** Psalms 147:18: “He sendeth forth His word and melteth them.” **3–4:** Literally, “it trickles through me.” The Hebrew uses the same word (*yitfu*—literally, “drip”) to characterize the action of the dew and the “juices” of the vine. Joel 4:18; also Amos 9:13, and the great Muslim prose writer, al-Jaahiz, on *nabiidh*, date wine: “When *nabiidh* soaks into your bones, spreads to every organ and suffuses into your brain, it clarifies your mind, redeems your spirit [from care], relaxes you in body and soul . . . it seeps into your soul and mingles with your blood” (*The Life and Works of Jahiz*, ed. Charles Pellat, [Berkeley, 1969], p. 54); Abu Nuwas: “[Wine] flows through their limbs like healing through a sick body” (*Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. J. Ashtiany et al. [Cambridge, 1990], pp. 230–31). **6:** Exodus 26:11, where “clasps” are part of the ornamental equipment of the sanctuary. **7:** Ezekiel 8:17; Deuteronomy 33:10. The Hebrew for “fragrance” recalls the myrrh of the Song of Songs (3:6) and the incense offered on the altars of Exodus (30:7). **8:** Zechariah 1:8, 10, 11: “I saw in the night and behold a man riding upon a red horse and standing among the myrtles.” In contrast to the messianic associations of myrtle in Zechariah, Yarden suggests that “myrtle” is simply a generic term for “flowers,” or that one is walking among the

flowering myrtle trees or bushes. In classical literature the myrtle is sacred to Venus and an emblem of love. **9–10:** Psalms 58:9. There is some dispute over how to read the word *tzitz*, which is used twice. The first time it means “flower” or “blossom” (Isaiah 40:6 and Numbers 17:23; 1 Kings 6:18: “And the cedar on the house [the Temple] . . . was carved with knops and open flowers”). In interpreting the second usage, most editors draw from the reference to Ibn Janaah and Jeremiah 48:9: “Give wings unto Moab.” The line says that one who walks about in the garden will be lifted into the air on a petal—or the wing of a petal—so as not to crush the flower beds. Other scriptural allusions are at work as well and establish an association with the ornament of the high priest: Exodus 28:36–38; Leviticus 8:9. **11–12:** Isaiah 61:10: “As a bride adorneth herself with her jewels”; Isaiah 3:18. The great Arab poet al-Mutanabbi writes: *wa-fi ‘anaq al-hasnah yithasan al-‘iqd* (“On the neck of the beautiful woman the necklace is made more beautiful”), which has a similar subject and chiasmic structure. The image of the sun as a bride is taken from Arabic poetry. **14:** Leviticus 26:17. **15–16:** 2 Kings 23:11: “And he took away the horses that the king of Judea had given to the sun . . . and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.” The combination of images in these lines recalls *Kingdom’s Crown*, particularly cantos 14 and 16. E. Zemach suggests the source of the image is the Greek myth of Apollo, the sun god, who gallops with chariots of fire across the sky. The story, he says, might have reached the Jewish poets through Arabic sources, but he also notes related images in *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer* 6 and other Jewish sources that show Greek influence. See E. Zemach, *KeShoresh Etz* (Tel Aviv, 1973), pp. 109ff. **17:** Yarden has “as you pass through the gardens.” **18:** Proverbs 26:23. **20:** Psalms 68:14: “The wings of the dove are covered with silver, and her pinions shimmer with gold.” **21–22:** Isaiah 60:14; Isaiah 49:23; *Sanhedrin* 91b: “Antoninus said to Rabbi: ‘Why does the sun rise in the east and set in the west?’ He replied, ‘Were it reversed thou wouldst ask the same question.’ ‘This is my question,’ said he. ‘Why does it set in the west?’ He answered: ‘In order to salute its Maker.’” Also *Kingdom’s Crown*, canto 15. **24:** Zemach notes that in the Jewish wedding ceremony the groom marks the taking of the bride into the sphere of his protection by drawing her in under a *tallit* or a hat or a coat (which is red in some communities)—biblical precedents for which are found in Ruth 3:9 and Ezekiel 16:8. Other readers have commented on the associations of the image with death, adding that the poem in many ways echoes the myth of Persephone.

#### THE FIELD

*SH*, #182. The heading in Schirmann reads: “And he offered this description of the abundant rainfall and the appearance of the first grasses.” Once again the poem registers an “upper world/lower world” correspondence; again the poet depicts a battle between darkness and light, and brings about a stunning reversal of polarities. **Line 1:** 2 Samuel 22:12; Job 6:5; 1 Samuel 6:12. **2:** Genesis 40:6–7;

Nehemiah 2:2–3. **3:** Some editors read this line as “like the masts of a ship.” The translation is based on Brody-Schirmann and refers to the difference between the heavy storm clouds of line 1, *‘avei-shehaqim*, and lighter cirrus clouds implied by the word *‘anan*. **4:** Again there are variant readings for this line: Zemach reads “like hunters blasting at rams’ horns.” The Hebrew alludes to Joshua 13:3 (“lords”) and Joshua 6:4–9 (“blast with the ram’s horn”). **5:** Jeremiah 4:28; Isaiah 5:30. **6:** Job 38:7 and 6:3. **7:** Malachi 3:20; Psalms 139:9. **8:** Job 26:8; Genesis 7:11–12; Proverbs 3:20. **9–10:** Some versions of the poem have another two lines here. Schirmann, however, says they are a later addition, and he omits them. The lines refer to the heavy clouds and read: “How they stood, massed against it, while swift as an eagle they once had fled.” Exodus 39:3: “And they did beat the gold into thin plates and cut it into threads to work it in the blue and the purple and the scarlet.” **11:** Deuteronomy 32:22; Psalms 38:3. I.e., the rain penetrated the field. **12:** Psalms 65:10–11. **13–14:** Proverbs 27:25; Job 40:20; Deuteronomy 29:28: “The secret things belong unto the Lord, but the things that are revealed belong unto us.” **15:** The Hebrew has the same *stav* here, the idea being that the poem traces the progress of the seasons. **16:** Isaiah 55:12.

#### THE BEE

*SH*, #184; *HaShira*, #220. This poem treats the recitation of the most important prayer in the Jewish liturgy, the Shema’, whose first part reads in the JPS translation as follows (from Deuteronomy 6:4): “Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Following the dictates of the Midrash and the Talmud, the final syllable of the word “one” (*ehad*) and the end of the first syllable of the word “remember” (*tizkeru*) in a later part of the prayer are emphasized, for reasons outlined below. In the Brody-Schirmann edition the poem is categorized as of uncertain authorship. **Line 1:** Judges 5:12: “Awake, awake Deborah, / Awake, awake, utter a song.” The line employs the wording from the “Song of Deborah”—“utter a song”—as it puns on the name Deborah (Devorah), which also means “bee.” **2–3:** *Berakhot* 13b: “It has been taught: Symmachus says: Whoever prolongs the word *ehad* (one), has his days and years prolonged. R. Aha b. Jacob said: [He must dwell] on the [letter] *daleth*. R. Ashi said: Provided he does not slur over the [letter] *heth*.” Cf. *Berakhot* 15b and 61b. Also *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer* 4: “One unifies his name . . . and recites the Shema’ Yisrael.” The line reads, literally, “uniting and extending in ‘one.’” Shulamit Elitzur suggests the image of the *daleth* may refer to an old pronunciation of the soft *daleth*, which may have sounded like the Arabic equivalent, closer to a hard *th*, as in the word “the” (*Leshonenu La’am* 397–8), and hence like the buzz of the bee. **4:** “Remember” appears in the third paragraph of the prayer: “So that you may remember and perform all my commandments.” The Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* 2:4: “One needs to stress [the letter *zayin*] so as to remember.” The play is on the Hebrew *tizkeru*, “remember” (Numbers 15:40), and *tiskeru*, “to lease/hire/bribe”, with which of

course it should not be confused. Emphasizing the z brings the worshiper back to the the proper intention of the prayer and commandments. **5:** Song of Songs 4:11: “Honey and milk are under thy tongue.” **6:** Much like Ibn Gabirol’s play on Deborah/*devora* (bee), *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:6 contains an extended play on *devarim* (words) and *devorim* (bees): “Just as the honey of the *bee* (*devora*) is sweet and its sting is sharp, so too are the *words* (*devarim*) of the Torah; any one who transgresses them receives his punishment. . . . But any one who fulfils the Torah merits long life. . . . Another explanation: . . . Just as the *bee* reserves honey for its owner and for the stranger its sting, so to Israel the *words* of the Torah are the elixir of life, but to the other nations the poison of death.” Also Deuteronomy 6:19: “To thrust out all thine enemies from before thee”; Job 20:12,14: “Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue.” **7:** I Samuel 15:17: “And Samuel said [unto Saul]: ‘Though thou be little in thine own sight, art thou not head of the tribes of Israel?’” **8:** Deuteronomy 21:17: “The right of the first-born is his,” where Ibn Gabirol plays on the Hebrew phrase and bends it toward meaning “the choicest sentence/portion is yours.” **9:** The images relate to the question of food that is kosher, or pure. *Bekhorot* 7b: “The Divine Law expressly permitted honey. For it was taught: R. Jacob says: *Yet these may ye eat of all the winged swarming things*: . . . An unclean fowl that swarms you must not eat, but you may eat what an unclean fowl casts forth from its body. And what is this? This is bees’ honey.” Also Daniel 10:11, where Daniel is referred to as a “precious” man, and Ibn Janaah, *Sefer HaShorashim*, under *h-m-d*, where the reference to Daniel is explained as meaning “a man of great virtues [merit] and good qualities.” **10:** Deuteronomy 14:11: “Of the clean birds you may eat.”

#### I’D GIVE UP MY SOUL ITSELF

*SH*, #197. This poem involves another classic instance of the poet’s lifting a poem in a lighter genre (the wine poem, which initially seems to be an erotic poem as well) into a much more resonant and evocative mythopoetic register. **Lines 1–2:** Exodus 21:28–30: “If an ox gore a man . . . If there be laid on him a ransom, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatsoever is laid upon him”; Psalms 49:8–9; Job 9:7. Here the speaker is (figuratively) willing to pay with his life for the serving boy’s beauty (or the wine he offers), and the redemption takes on the menacing associations of the biblical context. **3–4:** Proverbs 7:21, 31:6–7: “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul;/ Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more”; Isaiah 46:2. **5–6:** Proverbs 23:31–32: “Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup, when it glideth down smoothly; at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like a basilisk”; Leviticus 11:13. The griffon is a kind of vulture and the name, by design in this translation, carries overtones of the griffin, the mythological creature. **7–8:** The Hebrew has a homonym here: “Can a *heres* (sun) be put in *heres* (clay/potsherd)?” The English intensifies the rhyme

and alliteration but doesn't attempt to reproduce the pun. Isaiah 45:9; Psalms 22:16; Job 9:7. There is also a possibility that Ibn Gabirol is alluding to Deuteronomy 28:27, where *hares* indicates "the itch whereof thou canst not be healed"—i.e., his own skin disease. **9–10:** The slippery syntax of these lines (where the referent of "its" is twice suspended and initially unclear in the Hebrew) extends and complicates the allusion of the first stanza, wherein the wine poses a threat with its smooth talk. Psalms 13:3; Proverbs 31:6–7, above, lines 5–6. **11–12:** Bashan appears in Deuteronomy as a region in what is today northern Jordan and southern Syria. Hosea 2:20. Og's sixty fortified cities were legendary. Deuteronomy 3:4–11: "And we took all [of Og, King of Bashan's] cities. . . . All these were fortified cities, with high walls, gates, and bars. . . . For only Og, King of Bashan, remained of the remnant of the Rephaim, and behold his bedstead was a bedstead of iron . . . nine cubits [fifteen feet] was the length thereof, and four cubits [six-and-a-half feet] the breadth of it." *Rephaim* means, literally, ghosts, though in this biblical verse it refers to a race of giants. To appreciate the powers of the wine in this poem, it helps to recall the figure of Og in the Oral Tradition. There we read that "Og was born before the Flood and was saved from it by Noah on the promise that he and his descendants would serve Noah as slaves in perpetuity. Sihon and Og were giants, their foot alone measuring eighteen cubits. . . . During his reign he founded sixty cities, which he surrounded with high walls, the lowest of which was not less than sixty miles in height" (*Encyclopedia Judaica* [1972], 12:1341–42).

#### BE SMART WITH YOUR LOVE

SH, #211. Schirmann suggests that while Ibn Gabirol's other love poems involve the young poet trying his hand at the genre and embracing its "ideal," this poem, precisely because it breaks with the conventions of erotic verse, might accurately reflect the poet's experience. **Line 1:** Literally, "Consider and love," with the Hebrew word for "consider"—or in this translation, "be smart"—also meaning "set limits" or "check." Deuteronomy 13:15. **2:** Literally, "find scale [balance] for your love and a circle [boundary]." Proverbs 4:26. Also, Proverbs 16:11: "A balance and just scales." **3:** Literally, "while I looked into the limits [or 'that which has been searched out' or 'the deep things'] of love"—using the same roots (*h-q-r/a-h-v*) as line 1. Job 8:8, 11:7; Psalms 145:3. The poet is cautioned to be moderate, and his own inclination, as we know, is to inquire and seek out the metaphysical dimension in things. The essential word play on the root *h-q-r* pivots on the double-edged nature of "be smart" and involves a measure of self-irony, which becomes clear in the following lines. **4:** Adina, in Isaiah 47:8, means, literally, "a woman given to pleasure" or "the gentle," though it is also a name. **5:** Proverbs 27:5: "Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden." **7–8:** Psalms 74:6; Joel 4:13. **9:** Literally, "in the might of love." **10:** 1 Samuel 25:39: "And when David [the son of Jesse] heard that Nabal [the husband of Abigail] was dead, he . . . [David] sent and spoke concerning Abigail, to take her to him to wife." In Hebrew, Abigail is *Avi-guy'il*; in this poem Ibn Gabirol uses *Avigal*, for the rhyme.

## ALL IN RED

*SH*, #268. The heading reads: “A clever stanza of his.” **Lines 1–2:** “Red” might refer to the clothes or the color of the young man’s hair. The English reverses the order of the first two lines, which are somewhat obscure in the original and involve a play on the syllable *dom*, which on its own means “silent” or “mute.” Isaiah 63:1–2: “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with crimsoned garments from Bozrah? . . . Wherefore is Thine apparel red, And Thy garments like his that treadeth in the wine vat?”; Genesis 25:14, Targum Jonathan, which involves a play on the names of Ishmael’s sons. While normally an epithet for Christianity, Edom was also traditionally associated with the Messiah (see Ibn Gabirol’s liturgical poem “You Lie in My Palace,” (below), and *admoni* in the notes to that poem). For the Hebrew reader, then, religious associations are raised in the diction of the first three lines, only to be punctured with the final line’s explicitly sexual allusion. This combination of allusions might suggest that the poem is addressed to, or about, a Slav wine-server or *saqi*, that is, a fair-haired European convert to Islam, whom Ibn Gabirol is reassuring—he (the poet) is harmless. Also Jeremiah 47:6; Psalms 37:7: “Resign thyself (*dom*) unto the Lord.” **3–4:** Literally, either “By God” (*l’el*) or “It is in my hand to”; it appears that he is maintaining the religious overtones, playing on the idiom *l’el yadi* (it is in my power). Genesis 31:29: “It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt”; Genesis 19:1–5 for the “men of Sodom.”

## YOU’VE STOLEN MY WORDS

*SH*, #126; *HaShira*, #86:1. **Line 1:** Leviticus 19:11: “Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely”; also Joshua 7:11; Jeremiah 23:30: “Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal My words.” **2:** *Berakhot* 63a; Psalms 80:13, 89:41. **4:** Literally, “Did you hope to find [through stealing my poems] help in trouble?” **5:** Deuteronomy 30:12. **7:** 2 Kings 3:18. **8:** Daniel 12:5, and David Qimhi’s *Sefer HaShorashim* (Berolini, 1847), p. 131, on *ye’orot*, where he explains that the word normally means “channels,” but also refers to the Nile and the Tigris rivers. In Daniel it is “rivers.”

## THE ALTAR OF SONG

*SH*, #132; *HaShira*, #86:2. **Heading:** “About one who claimed for himself some of the poet’s work.” **Lines 1–2:** Hosea 14:5; Job 16:19; Genesis 41:19. **3–4:** Literally, “your knees are weak.” Isaiah 35:3. **5–6:** Proverbs 1:2–3. Line 6, literally, is: “Don’t ascend on the altar of poetry by degrees [steps].” **7–8:** Exodus 20:23: “Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not uncovered thereon”; Deuteronomy 25:11: “If the wife of one draweth near to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hands and taketh him by the secrets [the private parts].”

## THE PEN

Brody-Schirmann, #5. **Lines 1 and 4:** Jeremiah 9:7. The first word of the Hebrew, *'arom* (naked), puns on *'aroom*, which means clever (like the snake in the garden of Eden). For more on the use of martial imagery and writing in Arabic poetry see Schimmel, *Calligraphy*, pp. 118–19.

## IF YOU'D LIVE AMONG MEN

*SH*, #176; *HaShira*, #92. G. Bargebuhr (*The Alhambra: A Cycle of Studies on the Eleventh Century in Moorish Spain* [Berlin, 1968]) calls this “an Islamic poem in the Hebrew language” and quotes “the pessimistic and somewhat gnostic” al-Ma'arri, the poet he feels had the greatest influence on Ibn Gabirol: “I see but a single part of sweet in the many parts sour / and wisdom that cries: Beget no children, if thou art wise.” (trans. Nicholson). **Line 1:** The first line is deceptive in the Hebrew, as it appears to say, “if you want to live among [with] men of this world (*heled*).” The ambiguity is maintained in the English. Schirmann glosses: “to be among men who live eternal life” (relying, it would seem, on the Arabic *khuld*, i.e., eternity). Yarden reads: “If you want, among men of this world, to live [on] in eternity in the world to come.” Psalms 17:14–15: “[Deliver my soul from the wicked . . . ], from men, by Thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, whose portion is in this life, and whose belly Thou fillest with Thy treasure; Who have children in plenty, and leave their abundance to their babes. As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.” Also Psalms 49:2; Psalms 96:48; Job 11:17. **2:** Isaiah 33:14; Nahum 2:4. **3–4:** Line 3 might also read: “Take lightly what the world . . .” Isaiah 23:9; Psalms 49:13; 2 Kings 19:10; Psalms 49:17; Proverbs 3:13–16. **5:** Genesis 16:4 (the story of Hagar and Sarah); Proverbs 13:18. **6:** This line is heretical in the Jewish tradition, where the commandment is to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). See also *Nedarim* 64b, and notes to Moshe Ibn Ezra’s “If You See Me,” lines 17–18. 1 Chronicles 2:30: “But Seled died without children.” Seled was in the line of Judah (see 1 Chronicles 2:3f.). **8:** That is, while you’re alive, soul infuses your flesh; but after you die, the body will wear away and only soul will remain. Psalms 78:27; 1 Samuel 16:11; Job 16:15.

## I AM THE MAN

*SH*, #102; *HaShira*, #56. **Heading:** “And he was up late one Friday night and was looking about. And the light of the moon guided his way until the clouds thickened in the air and the horizon grew dark. As the rain began falling, the moon disappeared and he couldn’t see it. Then he described this situation and recited a poem that became famous.” Yehuda Ratzhaby reads the heading differently: “He went out to read by the light of the moon”—since it was the Sabbath and reading by lamplight was forbidden (*Leqet Shirim Metequfat HaZohar HaSefaradit*,

ed. Y. Ratzhaby [Tel Aviv, 1994], p. 59). **Line 1:** The elaborate rhetorical opening alludes to Lamentations 3:1 and, by implication, to what follows there: “I am the man that hath seen affliction.” The second half of the first line reads literally: “girded up his loins” [or “belt”] and alludes to 1 Kings 18:46: “And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins.” Also Job 38:3 and 40:7, where the Lord says to Job, out of the whirlwind: “Gird up now thy loins like a man.” **2:** Numbers 30:16. **3:** Literally, “whose heart [mind] was frightened by his heart [mind].” Schirmann glosses: “whose drive.” Ratzhaby comments: “when his old heart, the seat of wisdom, saw what his new heart had vowed, it trembled in fear.” Song of Songs 5:2. Septimus suggests that the line alludes to several rabbinic sources (*Yalqut Shim‘oni* 296, *Midrash Tehillim* 14:1), where man is described as having two hearts, i.e., two impulses, one to good, one to evil, and that what appears to be the presentation of a modern “divided self” is in fact a standard medieval figure (Dov Septimus, “He’arot leDivrei HAZAL beShirat Sefarad,” *Tarbiz* 53 [1983/84]: 1). It might also simply mean that his body and spirit were at war. **4:** Job 7:15–16. **6:** Isaiah 48:10; Psalms 12:7: “The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a crucible on the earth, refined seven times.” **7–8:** Ecclesiastes 3:2–3; Jeremiah 1:10; Isaiah 5:5. **10:** Or, “as misfortune surrounds him.” **11:** Literally, “And the children of the daughter of days.” The tenses in English depart from the Hebrew, and some commentators understand these lines to read: “He’d have made it to the limits of wisdom and right conduct if it hadn’t been for misfortune, which surrounded him, and fate, which shut him in.” **12:** Proverbs 1:7. **13:** Jeremiah 31:37. **16:** Psalms 73:26. **21:** I.e., “Even if the day (fate, time) doesn’t help me.” Genesis 22:3: “Then Abraham rose up early and saddled his ass”—to climb the mountain as God had commanded. **23:** Numbers 30:15–16. **25:** Job 3:25: “For the thing which I did fear is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of hath overtaken me”; Proverbs 10:24. **26–27:** For Yarden’s and Bialik-Ravnitzky’s “it was night,” Schirmann has: “While I was resting [sleeping, staying over for the night]”—opening the possibility that this might have been a dream-vision. Psalms 24:4. **29:** Isaiah 59:13: “conceiving and uttering.” This line in the Hebrew, like its biblical precedent, has proven hard to decipher, and the English maintains the ambiguity. The implication is that Ibn Gabirol saw the moon as a powerful, even magical, guide. **32:** Malachi 3:17. **34:** 1 Kings 20:38. **36:** Jeremiah 6:7. **37:** Isaiah 50:3. **39–40:** 2 Samuel 22:12. **41–42:** Numbers 22:6, 31:8 and Deuteronomy 23:5 for the story of Bilaam (Balaam) and the circumstances of his death. **43:** 1 Samuel 17:38: “And [Saul] clad [David] in a coat of mail”—before he went out to face Goliath. **48:** Jeremiah 48:40. **49:** The image of darkness as a raven appears often in Arabic poetry, from pre-Islamic verse on. Here it is lightning that sends the ravens up into the air. There are various interpretations of the referents in this line; the English maintains the ambiguity of the Hebrew. **53:** As a warrior (the allusion is to Samson) breaks free from his chains, so the poet’s thoughts, will, and heart would free themselves from the prison of the body. Judges 15:13–14. Also Psalms 78:65. My reading here, in many other instances, draws on Devorah Breg-

man's detailed study of the poem ("Tznefat Hur," *Mehqerei Yerushalayim beSifrut Ivrit* 14, part 2 [1988]:460). **54-55:** The transition and recapitulation of the poem's earlier images here is not altogether clear, but it seems to be saying that "this is the state of mankind," to be torn from within, and shackled and bound from without, and therefore the poet had best reconsider his ambition and accept the given state of things with humility. Job 30:26; Proverbs 20:20. See also Coleridge's "Dejection," lines 45-46: "I may not hope from outward forms to win/The passion and the life, whose fountains are within." **59:** Psalms 123:2. **60:** Literally, "has his spear beaten" (or "broken"), as in Isaiah 2:4, "into plowshares." **64:** The line might also read, literally, "though he put his holy of holies [dwelling] in the house of [among] the brightest stars [splendor]." The word in question is *noga*, which most likely refers to Venus. (See *Kingdom's Crown* 14, where Venus is associated with mirth and well-being.) At least one scriptural association, however, also suggests the moon: Isaiah 60:19. See also Proverbs 4:18-19.

#### HEART'S HOLLOW

*SH*, #173; *HaShira*, #91. The Arabic heading from Brody-Schirmann reads: "And this which speaks in dispraise of Time." **Lines 1-4:** Job 11:12, "A hollow man shall get understanding" (NJPS). Bialik-Ravnitzky comments: "Man's heart is hollow and empty, and wisdom [philosophy, thought] is obscured [or blocked] to him, and only his body and its affairs are visible and apprehensible, and people are drawn to them." In short, one is trapped in the world and in the body, and only death will offer release. **6:** Literally, "find evil [or trouble]." "Corruption" picks up on Schirmann's gloss to the previous lines. **7:** This line might also be understood as "Man in the ground rejoices in nothing." **8-9:** The implied metaphor of rebellion and struggle is that of body/servant versus master/soul (or master of the world, i.e., God). Proverbs 30:22-23; 1 Kings 16:9-10; 2 Kings 9:31. **10-11:** Micah 7:6-10: "For the son dishonoreth the father, a daughter riseth up against her mother. . . . A man's enemies are the men of his own house. But as for me, I will look unto the Lord . . . He will bring me forth to the light. . . . Who said unto me: Where is the Lord thy God? Mine eyes shall gaze upon her; Now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets." The English reverses the order of the Hebrew images in these lines. **14:** Ecclesiastes 8:15; Job 7:5: "My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust." **15-16:** Ecclesiastes 3:20-21: "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return to dust. Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upwards, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth?" Also Ecclesiastes' closing words: "And the dust returneth to the earth, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The original has "dust returns to dust," or "clay returns to clay"; "slime" in the penultimate line picks up on Micah 7:10 (above, line 10).

## I LOVE YOU

SH, #74. Line for line one of the most thoroughly discussed works in all of post-biblical literature. Essentially the debate concerns the nature of the poem and its philosophical or theological implications. According to the Arabic superscription it is “an answer to a student who has asked about the nature of existence.” Bialik-Ravnitzky refers to another source wherein it is described, by R. David Qimhi, as a poem about “the mysteries of creation.” It is important to note in this context that there is also a legend according to which Ibn Gabirol created a golem: “They said of R. S[helomo] Ben Gabirol, that he created a woman, and she waited on him. When he was denounced to the authorities, he showed them that she was not a perfect creature, and [then] he turned her to her original [state], to the pieces and hinges of wood, out of which she was built up” (from Shelomo del Medigo, *Matzref leHokhma*, in Moshc Idel, *Golem* [Albany, 1990] p. 233). Comparing this poem to the philosophical treatise *The Fountain of Life*, scholar Yehuda Liebes notes that “in the relationship between the teacher and the pupil the secret of creation is given expression” (“The Book of Creation in R. Shelomo Ibn Gabirol and a Commentary on His Poem ‘I Love You’” [Hebrew], *The Proceedings of the Second International Congress on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, 1987, in *Mehqarei Yerushalayim* 63–4 (1987): 73–123.) For detailed English discussion of the poems’ particulars and its background, see Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 261–64. **1:** Genesis 22:2: “Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah”; Isaiah 43:4. **3:** Deuteronomy 6:5, from which the Shema’ is taken. (See “The Bee.”) **5–7:** Ecclesiastes 1:13, 7:25; Psalms 72:6. Liebes points out that Sa’adia Gaon in his introduction to the *Sefer Yetzira* also describes the first principle and the secret of creation as “far off and deep.” Sa’adia raises the issues again in his major philosophical work, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, where he notes that King Solomon was able to understand the issue only because he ascended from the level of philosophy to that of prophecy. As we have seen, Ibn Gabirol often identified with his biblical namesake and was also familiar with Sa’adia’s influential book. **8:** Isaiah 44:18; Psalms 82:5. **11–13:** The Hebrew is particularly difficult to paraphrase, and the English is woven accordingly. Liebes suggests that the “sages” of the poem are in fact the sages of the Neoplatonic, Gnostic gospels, in particular the *Gospel of Truth* (“The Book of Creation and R. Shelomo Ibn Gabirol,” pp. 120–23); Schlanger is also quoted as suggesting that the lines refer to thinkers “with gnostic tendencies.” (See Ya’aqov Schlanger, *HaPhilosophia shel Shelomo Ibn Gabirol*, trans. from French by Y. Ur [Jerusalem, 1979]). “Owes all” in line 12, is based on a reading by Zemach, but is usually understood to mean “for the sake of.” Proverbs 16:4; 1 Chronicles 29:11–16. Also, *Berakhot* 6:8: “He who drinks water to quench his thirst recites [the blessing]: ‘For all was created at his word.’” The Hebrew for “word” in this blessing and in the poem is *davar*, one of the more complex or overloaded terms in the lan-

guage; from the same root we derive “commandments,” “thing,” “a matter of importance,” and the verb “speak.” It appears three times in this poem by Ibn Gabirol. See also *Fountain of Life*, 410: “Unity [oneness] overcomes (the) all and extends through (the) all, and sustains (the) all.” Line 13 might also be understood as saying that the secret, or mystery, of all creation resides in each person (in all), in their power to create. This individual aspect of “all” is used in Isaiah 43 (verse 7), a chapter Ibn Gabirol alludes to several times in the course of the poem. **14:** Literally, “He longs to appoint (or place, establish) there-is as [like] there-is,” or “being as near-being.” Bialik-Ravnitzky comments: “‘Primary matter,’ which in *The Fountain of Life* is called ‘foundation,’ has no true existence of its own, but is ‘like-existence,’ and longs to couple with ‘form,’ so that the Creator will give it true existence; and this desire of matter to take on form is very great . . . and according to the ancients is the reason for the eternal movement in creation.” Numbers 24:23. Yarden glosses: “All things long for God to establish them in being that resembles the true being, which is the Lord.” **16–18:** Isaiah 43:7: “Everyone that is called by My Name whom I have created for my glory, I have formed him, yea I have made him.” **19–20:** There are two readings of the last line and numerous interpretations of their meaning. Literally, “Now, get (*qnei*) a sign to set it [him] up aright” and “Now, offer (*tena*) a sign to set it [him] up aright.” Sachs, Bialik-Ravnitzky, and Liebes prefer the latter, all others—including all extant manuscripts—have the former. Arguing that the next word in the poem, *mofet* (sign, example), appears numerous times in Scripture after the verb *natan*, from which *tena* is formed, Liebes suggests that a copyist’s error may have changed *tena* to *qnei* (in Hebrew only the initial letter is different)—but that in the Gabirolian context, the thrust is similar: create or form signs with your behavior that will embody what you have learned from the teacher. Exodus 97:9: “Show a wonder”; 1 Kings 13:3: “And he gave a sign the same day”; Deuteronomy 13:2.

Both readings further allude to *Sefer Yetzira* 1:4: “And put the matter straight and set the creator in his proper place.” Cf. also Ezra 2:68 (which appears in *Sefer Yetzira* 1:4): “And some of the heads of the fathers’ houses, when they came to the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of God to set it up in its place” (or the NJPS: “to erect the House of God in its site”), where the subject of the Hebrew is one that Ibn Gabirol returns to repeatedly: a “second creation.”

In distinction to other scholars who stress the passive philosophical aspects of the poem, in which the student is expected to find proof or support, perhaps in the literature, for the teacher’s claims, Liebes is convinced of the fundamentally erotic nature of the final line, in which the religious pursuit is embodied. As God’s love leads to the creation of the world, the teacher’s love leads to the development of the student’s knowledge and the alteration of his action in the world. In both cases the flow must be reversed along the ladder of being, and “spirit” raised or returned to “spirit.”

## BEFORE MY BEING

SQ, #126; *HaShira*, #96. Schirmann says this poem's genre isn't known, but that it may be a *baqasha* (poem of petition), as the first line is repeated at the end of the poem. Yarden suggests that it may be a *reshut* to the *nishmat*. (See the glossary for all three terms.) Scheindlin describes it as a poem about the creation of the human species, not just the individual person (*The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul* [Philadelphia, 1991], pp. 209–13). As in many of Ibn Gabirol's poems, examination of the microcosm of the "I" leads to contemplation of the macrocosm, and what appears to be a naive expression of religious faith is actually a complex formulation of a much less comforting philosophical understanding. One should keep in mind as well that the poem was possibly part of the liturgy. See also Yehuda HaLevi's "You Knew Me." **Line 1:** Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee"; Psalms 119:41. **2:** *Sefer Yetzira* 2:5: "He created from utter chaos and made of the void existence." Ibn Gabirol uses this image at least five other times in his poems, including the famous instance of *Kingdom's Crown* (canto 9). Scheindlin notes the ambiguity of the Hebrew syntax, maintained in the English here, which establishes the ironic reading of the poem: the line implies that God destroys existence—brings existence or being to nothing—and also creates existence from nothingness. In this reading, the existence of the pure soul is sullied by its descent into the world of the body. **3–4:** Psalms 139:15: "My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth"; Job 10:10. **5:** Genesis 2:7: "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." *Neshama* in the biblical citation and the poem is both "breath" and "soul." Scheindlin quotes George Herbert on prayer: "God's breath in man returning to his birth." **6:** Jonah 2:3: "Out of the belly of the netherworld cried I"; also Psalms 139:15 (lines 3–4 above). Following the Targum to the verse in Psalms, Yarden glosses: "out of the belly of my mother." Scheindlin: "The workshop in which this flesh of man was made is not Eden but Sheol." **7:** 2 Samuel 7:18; Psalms 71:17. **9:** The central prayer of the liturgy, the *'amida*: "O favor us with knowledge, understanding, and discernment. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, gracious Giver of knowledge." The line literally reads: "Who taught me understanding and made me wondrous [more than other creatures]?" **9–10:** Isaiah 64:7; Jeremiah 18:6; Job 10:9; Ezekiel 29:3. **11–12:** Psalms 32:5; Genesis 3:13. **13:** Job 27:11. **13–14:** See line 1, though now the "mercy" and act of God have taken on an ironic cast. Calling the confession of line 13 "not the humble expression of that feeling of being transparent before God . . . [but] a taunt," Scheindlin notes the possible use in line 14 of the Hebrew *hesed*, "mercy" or "kindness," as a homonym, meaning "shame," from Leviticus 20:17: "If a man shall take his sister . . . and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness: it is a shameful thing (*hesed hu*)." I.e., the poet may be saying, "I am a sinner, but you in your so-called kindness created me as such."

## THREE THINGS

SQ, #138; *HaShira*, #97:2. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. Scheindlin comments: “Of all of Ibn Gabirol’s poems, this miniature masterpiece most clearly, succinctly and beautifully evokes the inward-looking character of his religious thought and experience” (*Gazelle*, 191–93). He notes the poem’s progression from far-off sky to earth to mind, adding that “the author of the Psalms might very well have been inspired by sky and earth to praise God; but that the mind of man should also be a source of inspiration is a distinctively medieval contribution to religious thought.” Also characteristic is the opposition of first person and second person throughout the poem—so that a poem in praise of God is in fact held intact compositionally by the (on the face of it odd) repetition of the first-person pronouns referring to the speaker. **Line 3:** Isaiah 26:8; Psalms 8:4–10. On the use of God’s name, see note to “The Hour of Song,” lines 3–4. **4:** Psalms 19:2, 45:18; Isaiah 8:2. **5–7:** Isaiah 42:5; Job 38:4–5. **8:** Psalms 34:2, 104:1. In lines 7–8 there is an elusive play on *adanai* (“foundations”)—as in “the extender of my foundations” (line 7, literally)—which is juxtaposed with *adonai* (“my Lord”), the name of God (line 8). Psalms 39:4, 5:2, 19:15.

## I LOOK FOR YOU

SQ, #24; *HaShira*, #97:4. A *reshut* to the *nishmat* for the Day of Atonement, and one of the more famous poems in the liturgy, as it appears in many prayerbooks. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. **Lines 1–4:** Psalms 62:7, 5:4. Line 4 might also be understood as “my morning prayer and my evening prayer.” **6:** Literally, “afraid”—without “confused.” Job 28:9. **7–8:** Lamentations 3:60; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 20:12; Genesis 6:5. **9–10:** Judges 8:3. Scheindlin points out that the source of the idea here is the Arabic maxim *innamaa ’l-insaan al-qalb wa-’l-lisaan* (“The being of man is the heart and tongue”). **11–12:** Job 6:11; Isaiah 26:5. **13–16:** Psalms 69:31–32, 104:34; 2 Samuel 22:50; Job 27:2–3: “As God liveth, who hath taken away my right . . . all the while my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils.” As is customary in this type of poem, the final line of the poem leads into the powerful Sabbath-morning *nishmat* prayer.

## OPEN THE GATE

SQ, #145; *HaShira*, #99:7. A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. Addressed by the congregation of Israel to God. **Lines 1–2:** The poem begins with a reversal of the situation in the Song of Songs 5:2, where the woman waits in her room and hears her beloved: “Harken! my beloved knocketh: ‘Open to me, my sister, my love.’” In this poem the terms are reversed, and the feminine congregation of Israel is asking her lover, the Lord, to open the gate and come to help her. This is somewhat misleading, however, as the poem is in fact a complaint concerning Israel’s condition in exile. Bialik-Ravnitzky comments: “The poet is knocking at the gates of

heaven, of mercy.” **3:** Psalms 6:3–6; Ezekiel 27:35. **4:** “My mother’s maid” refers to Hagar, Sarah’s handmaid. Genesis 16:1–4 tells the story of Hagar and her child, Ishmael, whom she bore to Abraham, and who is considered the ancestor of the Arabs in the Jewish tradition. After Hagar conceived, “her mistress was despised in her eyes.” **5–6:** After Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham, Sarah had her husband send Hagar and Ishmael away into the “wilderness of Beersheba.” Genesis 21:15: “And the water in the bottle was spent, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him . . . and lifted up her voice, and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad.” Also Ezekiel 31:10. **7–9:** The allegorical vocabulary is extended here. “Midnight’s blackness” is the exile from the Land of Israel; “wild ass” is a traditional epithet for Islam—Scripture having noted that Ishmael would be a “wild ass of a man” (Genesis 17:11–12), while Christianity is called a “wild boar” (*Leviticus Rabbah* 13:5, on Leviticus 11:7: “‘and the swine’: ‘the swine,’ this is Edom”). Also Psalms 80:14. Scheindlin links the use of “middle” and “midnight” to Ibn Gabirol’s (and others’) attempts to calculate precisely the time of the redemption, noting the scriptural context in the Book of Daniel, which also alludes to a “specific date for the redemption” (*Gazelle*, p. 107). **10:** Daniel 12:4: “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.” **11:** Jeremiah 45:3. **12:** Literally, “there is no one to understand for me—and I am ignorant” (“brutish”). Daniel 8:27: “I was appalled at the vision, but understood it not”; Psalms 142:5, 73:22: “I was brutish and ignorant; I was as a beast before Thee.” The English “blind” departs somewhat from the Hebrew, which is like that of the Psalms: “brutish and ignorant.” I’ve let the music bring the English in a slightly different direction, one that picks up on trapped aspects of Ibn Gabirol’s character that are made explicit in other poems.

#### THE HOUR OF SONG

SQ, #150; *HaShira*, #97:7. A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. **Lines 1–4:** Psalms 31:2–6. **5–8:** Literally, “there is no helper.” Psalms 142:4: “Look on my right hand and see, for there is no man that knoweth me”; Isaiah 63:5; Psalms 31:6, above (lines 1–4). “Loneness” is an epithet for the soul, as in Psalms 22:21. **9–12:** Ecclesiastes 2:10; Psalms 142:6; Ecclesiastes 2:20–21. **13–16:** “I’m immersed” for *eshgeh* is based on Yarden’s note, which reads “I occupy myself,” and also on Proverbs 5:19: “A lovely hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; with her love be thou ravished (*tishgeh*) always. Why then wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman?” Job 35:10. “Worship” and “work” in Hebrew are identical.

#### SEND YOUR SPIRIT

SQ, #107. A *mehayyeh* for Passover, the Prayer for Dewfall. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. **Lines 1–2:** Literally, “to revive our bodies.” Psalms 104:30: “Thou sendest forth

thy spirit”; Nehemiah 9:20. **3–4:** *Eretz hatzvi* (“the land of desire,” or “the land of glory”) in the original is an epithet for the Land of Israel, as in 2 Samuel 1:19: “Thy glory [beauty], O Israel, upon thy high places is slain.” The word *tzvi* here means, literally, “that which is desired.” (See “gazelle” in the glossary.) Jeremiah 3:19. **5:** Hosea 14:9. **6:** Psalms 145:9: “The Lord is good to all.” **7–8:** Psalms 85:7: “Wilt Thou not quicken us again?”

#### ANGELS AMASSING

SQ, #28; *HaShira*, #106. An *ofan* for the Day of Atonement. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. **Lines 1–2:** The English opening to a certain extent reflects the heavy alliterative effect of the Hebrew, which is characteristic of the genre and, as it were, imitates the sound the angels make. *Shinanim* means “thousands” and is an epithet for “angels.” It is drawn from Psalms 68:18: “The chariots of God are myriad, even thousands upon thousands.” Also Ezekiel 3:13: “Then a spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me a great rushing: . . . also the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing.” One might also read the angels as thoughts, and see the poem as a whole as the Vision of a Loud Mind. (See note to lines 7–11 below.) **2:** Ezekiel 1:7. **3:** Isaiah 6:1–2; 1 Kings 22:19. **4–5:** Like the fourth and fifth lines of each stanza, these directly anticipate the important liturgical station that will follow the poem. Isaiah 6:3: “And one called unto another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” **6:** Psalms 29:1: “Ascribe to the Lord, O ye sons of might, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.” The Targum reads “divisions of angels” for “sons of might”—*bnei elim*—which is one of the more common biblical terms for angels. Other terms for angels that appear in the poem include *serafim*, *erelim*, *hashmalim*, and *hayot*. The terms are elusive in the original, and in the poem usually only their associations are translated. **7–8:** The specific kinds of angels referred to in these lines allude to Ezekiel 1:4: “Behold . . . a great cloud with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it . . . as the color of electrum,” and *Hagigah* 13b: “What does [the word] *hashmal* mean?—Rab Judah said: Living creatures speaking fire.” Also Ezekiel 1:14: “And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning”—a phrasing that figures in *Sefer Yetzira*, chapter 1, where it refers to the heart’s (or mind’s) activity and risks. **9:** “The angels consist of fire and water, or according to another account, of four heavenly elements: mercy, strength, beauty, and dominion, corresponding to the four earthly elements: water, fire, earth, and air” (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2:956ff.). Avraham Ibn Ezra recalls the intellectual aspect of the angels as well, in his biblical commentary to Genesis 28:12 (Jacob’s ladder): “And R. Shelomo the Spaniard [Ibn Gabirol] said that a ladder alludes to the upper soul, and the angels of god—wisdom’s thought.” **10:** Isaiah 29:23. Also the Sabbath Qedusha; see note to line 16 below. **14:** Daniel 12:1. **15:** Psalms 68:18. **16:** Genesis 1:9; *Sefer HaBahir* 11: “Michael the prince on the right

of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is water and hail”; the Sabbath Qedusha of the (Mussaf for additional service): “We will reverence Thee and sanctify Thee in the mystic utterance of the holy Serafim. . . . His ministering angels ask one another, ‘Where is the place of His glory?’” **17:** “Partition” is the word used for the cover or curtain before the Holy Ark in the synagogue, *pargod*. *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer* 4: “Seven angels created in the beginning serve Him before the veil which is called *pargod*.” **19–23:** The language of this stanza in the original is drawn both from that of the tent of meeting (Exodus 40:22) and Gabriel’s coming to overturn Sodom (*Baba Metzia* 86b and Genesis 18:16). **20–21:** The word *serafim* derives from *saraf*, burned. *Sefer HaBahir* 11b: “And Gabriel the prince on the left of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is fire”; 2 Kings 2:18, 18:17. **26:** Song of Songs 4:4. I.e., Nuriel was a picture of strength and power. **27:** Jeremiah 47; Job 26:11, 22:14. **28:** Exodus 3:14: “I am that I am”—the Lord’s answer when Moses asks Him what His name is. Literally, “I-am, the creator of the heavens and the netherworld.” **31:** Job 16:19. **33:** *Hagigah* 13b: “Sandalfon . . . stands behind the chariot and wreathes crowns for his Maker”; Job 31:36; *Sefer Yetzira* 3:7: “He made the letter *alef* king over breath and bound a crown to it.” **38:** *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer* 4: “And the creatures stand in fear and terror.” “Will set strong”: literally, “their feet were straight” (Ezekiel 1:7). **41:** In the Qedusha prayer the word “holy” is repeated three times, as in the quote from Isaiah 6:3. “Holy” in Hebrew denotes separation.

#### AND SO IT CAME TO NOTHING

SQ, #81. A *piyyut* for the Additional Prayers of the Day of Atonement. An alphabetical acrostic is embedded in the Hebrew, with *Shelomo* following. This poem recalls earlier (c. fifth-century C.E.) *piyyutim* such as Yossi Ben Yossi’s “‘Ain lanu kohen gadol lekhapeir be’adeinu” (We have no high priest to atone for us), as it contrasts the ritual glories of the past with the ruins of the exilic present. The list that follows in lines 5–20 is drawn from a combination of scriptural and talmudic sources. On occasion I depart from the order and literal meaning in the interest of sound and comprehension in English. **Lines 1–4:** Isaiah 64:10. **5–6:** *Yoma* 2a: “There was a place on the Temple mount called *Birah*. Resh Lakish said: The whole sanctuary is called *Birah*, as it is written: ‘And to build the *Birah* [palace] for which I have made provision’ [1 Chronicles 29:19]”; *Middot* 5:3–4: “Six offices were in the courtyard [of the Temple] . . . the office made of hewn stone, there the great Sanhedrin of Israel was in session.” **7–8:** *Sanhedrin* 94b: “That wicked man [Sennacherib] said: First will I destroy [His] nether abode [the Temple on earth], and then the upper”; *Tamid* 3:5: “The shambles was located at the north of the altar, and on it were eight short pillars, and square blocks of cedar wood were on them. And iron hooks were set into them . . . on which they would suspend [the slaughtered beasts]”; Leviticus 9:19–20; Isaiah 44:28. **9–10:** 1 Kings 7:32: “And the axletree of the wheels were in one base”; *Yoma* 3:3: “Five acts of immersion . . . does the high priest carry out on that day”; Leviticus 16:15–21: “Then shall he kill

the goat of the sin-offering, that is for the people . . . when he goeth in to make atonement in the holy place . . . for himself, and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.” **11–12:** Leviticus 23:37: “an offering by fire unto the Lord . . . a burnt-offering, and a meal-offering . . . and drink-offerings”; Leviticus 24:5–6: “And thou shalt take fine flour and bake twelve cakes. . . . And thou shalt set them in two rows, six in a row, upon the pure table before the Lord”; Exodus 40:22: “And he put the table in the tent of meeting, . . . and he set a row of bread in order upon it before the Lord.” **13–14:** *Yoma* 5:4: “He slaughtered [the goat] . . . and he sprinkled some [of its blood] . . . like one who cracks a whip”; Leviticus 16:12: “And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil.” **15–16:** Leviticus 4:12: “The skin of the bullock, and all its flesh . . . shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out”; *Yoma* 7:5: “The high priest serves in eight garments: tunic [robe] . . .”; Exodus 28:2: “And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron . . . for splendor and for beauty.” **17–18:** Leviticus 16:10, 21, where the ritual sending of the scapegoat into the wilderness is discussed. The scapegoat is chosen by lot, Aaron confesses over the goat the iniquities of the people, and a man is appointed to lead it into the wilderness—“And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off.” Mishna *Yoma* 6:3 says that a priest was sent out with the goat to make sure that it didn’t return to a settled area; 6:6–8 mentions the later practice of hurling the scapegoat from a cliff. The Hebrew refers to “Azazel,” whose precise meaning is uncertain, but which seems to imply a goat-demon of sorts, a ruler of the wilderness, into whose realm the scapegoat was sent (Baruch Levine, *Leviticus, JPS Torah Commentary* [Philadelphia, 1989], pp. 102–3).

#### HE DWELLS FOREVER

SQ, #6. A *mustajaab l’malkhuyot*. Triple acrostic: *Shelomo HaQatan Bar Yehuda*. This poem is recited during the New Year service in the Sephardic liturgy, as part of the additional prayers dealing with the kingdom (*malkhut*) of God. It picks up on the line from Psalms 145:13: “Your kingdom is the kingdom of eternity” [or in the NJPS: “Your kingship is kingship for eternity”—literally, “of all worlds” or “all times”], which acts as a choral refrain (rhyming with the last line of each quatrain), then weaves together numerous motifs drawn directly from *Sefer Yetzira*. The refrain has not been factored into the translation. **Lines 1–5:** Isaiah 57:15; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:1; *Sefer Yetzira* (long version) 6:1; Isaiah 2:11; Psalms 148:13; Ecclesiastes 4:8; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:5; *Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer* 3: “From what place were the heavens created? From the light of the Holy One, blessed be His garment”; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:1: “He created His universe with three books (*sefarim*),” or three words with the *s-f-r* root: *sefer*, *sefar*, *sippur*—text, number, telling or story. **6–10:** “Against them inscribed ten without end . . . five against five”—literally, “are aligned” or “in agreement.” Moshe Idel argues that this refers to the qabbalistic notion of

the existence of ten additional, supernal *sefirot* [spheres] above the standard ten. *Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer* 3: “The Holy One, blessed be He, consulted the Torah . . . to create the world”; *Genesis Rabbah* 1:1: “*Amon*: pedagogue . . . So the Holy One, blessed be He, looked in the Torah and created the world”; *Genesis* 31:30: “Thou sore longest for thy father’s house”; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:1–2: “The ten *sefirot* of Nothingness . . . their measure is ten which have no end . . . ten like the number of ten fingers, five opposite five.” 11–15: *Sefer Yetzira* 1:5; *Sefer Yetzira* 6:1: above, lines 1–5. 16–20: “Caught in a siege”—*Sefer Yetzira* 1:5: “Their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end”; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:5, lines 11–15 above; *Sefer Yetzira* 6:3. 21–25: *Sefer Yetzira* 2:1: “Twenty foundation letters”; *Sefer Yetzira* 3:3: “Fire is above and water is below, and breath [wind] is the decree dividing between them”; *Sefer Yetzira* 5:3: “Twelve elementals . . . with them He formed twelve constellations [the zodiac] in the universe.” 26–30: *Sefer Yetzira* 2:5: “From Chaos He formed substance, and He made that which was not into that which is. He carved great stones [pillars] out of air that cannot be grasped”; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:12: “Chaos is an azure line that surrounds all the world; Void consists of the spongy rocks that are established in the abyss, between which water emanates.” 31–35: *Sefer Yetzira* 1:14: “He selected three letters from among the Elementals, and fixed them in His great Name, YHVH; with them He sealed the six directions”; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:12: “Four is fire from water. With it He engraved and carved the throne of Glory, *serafim*, *ofanim*, and the holy *hayyot* [creatures] and the ministering angels”; *Genesis* 1:14: “let [the lights be] for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.” 36–40: *Sefer HaRazim* 7:29: “He hung the world like a cluster of grapes”; *Genesis Rabbah* 68:9: “The Holy One, blessed be He, is the place of the world and the world is not His place”; *Isaiah* 26:4. 41–45: “Life beyond time”—literally, “eternal life.” *Sefer Yetzira* 1:9; *Psalms* 93:2, 145:11; *I Chronicles* 29:12; *Genesis* 1:2. 46–50: *Psalms* 113:4. 51–55: The Prayer for the New Moon: “Who with His word creates the heavens, and their hosts with the breath of His mouth”; *Psalms* 33:6; *Sefer Yetzira* 6:1: “Exalted (*nasa*) . . . because He supports (*nosei*) and sustains the entire universe [world]”; *Isaiah* 46:4, 4:28; *Job* 5:13. 56–60: *Job* 26:7; *Amos* 9:6; *Genesis* 1:6–7; *Job* 28:11: “And the thing that is hidden bringeth He forth to light.” 61–65: *Job* 11:10; *I Samuel* 2:7; *Job* 16:12: “He hath taken me by the neck and dashed me to pieces”; *Isaiah* 2:14. 66–70: *Proverbs* 30:8; *Ezekiel* 34:26. 71–75: *I Samuel* 2:6; *Psalms* 17:14; *Ezekiel* 37:8; *Job* 10:11. 76–80: *Genesis* 2:7, 3:19; the *nishmat* prayer: “Thou arouseth those who sleep and awakeneth men from their slumber”; *Daniel* 12:2: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence.”

#### HAVEN'T I HIDDEN YOUR NAME

SQ, #135; *HaShira*, #97:5. A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. Lines 1–4: *Psalms* 63:2–3; *Job* 11:13; *Psalms* 55:17–18. The speaker moans/longs for the Lord, not like any

beggar come to any door, but like one come to the speaker's door—so that the speaker is, as it were, begging from himself. In other words, the speaker is like a beggar before the Lord, and like a lord before the beggar at his door (which is also the door—*delet*—to his poem; see “Line” in the glossary and Ibn Gabirol's “I've Made You My Refuge,” below). He seeks admission to his own reflection, wherein God is somehow contained (lines 5–6). Similar paradoxes are set out in the following lines, and this seemingly conventional poem of praise becomes a powerful poem of experience. 5–6: 1 Kings 8:27: “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded.” Scheindlin notes the presence of the pun on *ve'ulam*, a homonym which means “and yet” in the poem and “a temple” in the allusion to the verse from 1 Kings. The paradox evident here, he says, is the gist of the poem, and it resembles both the rabbinic saying, “The world is not His place, but rather He is the place of the world,” and the Sufi tradition attributed to Muhammad according to which God said, “My earth and My heaven contain me not, but the heart of my faithful servant containeth Me.” 7–8: Psalms 119:11; Job 10:13, 27:3; Jeremiah 20:9: “And if I say: ‘I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak any more in His name,’ then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot”; Psalms 17:3: “Thou hast tested me and Thou findest not that I had a thought which should not pass my mouth.”

#### LORD WHO LISTENS

SQ, #93. A *reshut* for the *qaddish* of the first day of Sukkot, the Festival of Booths. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. **Lines 1–2:** Psalms 22:25, 34:7; Genesis 25:21, 13:2, 10:1. **3–4:** Literally, “calling day and night.” Psalms 102:1, 61:3, 57:8, 112:7–8, 86:12–13. **5–6:** Psalms 28:7, 5:3; Genesis 41:15. **7–8:** Psalms 27:4, 61:2, 86:6; *Shabbat* 19:5: “An infant is circumcised on the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh or twelfth days [after birth], never sooner [less], never later [more].”

#### I'VE MADE YOU MY REFUGE

Sigi Ben-Ari, “HaMeshorer u'Venot HaShir—Reshut Hadasha le Shelomo Ibn Gabirol,” *Mehqerei Yerushalayim beSifrut Ivrit* 14 (1993):109. A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. This poem was recently discovered among the texts and scraps of texts that comprise the Cairo Geniza collection. Ben-Ari offers the interpretation that the poem deals with Ibn Gabirol's fear that the “daughters of song” (the Muses) have deserted him at the start of a poem. Moshe Ibn Ezra, in his book of poetics (83a), comments on the phenomenon as well: “As for the poet, his fortune shifts, and his muse [literally, ‘the daughter of his song’] sometimes attends to him and sometimes rebels. . . . When his heart turns away, the poem starts to stray. Therefore one of them said: ‘When the pain starts, there is no poem [song] in the heart.’ And one of the best poets has stated: ‘I am considered by people to be

a great poet, but it sometimes happens to me that it's easier to pull out one of my molars than to write a single couplet [line].” **Line 1:** Psalms 73:28. **2:** 1 Samuel 2:7. **3:** Literally, “I rose to declare your oneness with the first few words of the poem.” Again, in the context of the Hebrew-Andalusian poetics, “door” also refers to the first hemistich in a given line. The slight awkwardness in the symmetry of the lines and their off rhymes (poor/lord, store/sure) seek to account for a similar difficulty in the Hebrew, which Ben-Ari suggests was due to the poet’s difficulty in composition. **5:** Psalms 31:20. **8–9:** Literally, “What is my sin to you?” **10–11:** Ecclesiastes 12:4: “And one shall start up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song shall be brought low.” Standard rabbinic interpretations of this biblical passage say that it is describing the effects of aging on a person. In this vein Avraham Ibn Ezra comments as follows on the same verse from Ecclesiastes: “*And all the daughters of song shall be brought low*—this is the throat, which once gave song, though now its voice is bowed low.” Ben-Ari, however, interprets the lines metaphorically, with the “daughters” of song here being the muses, or inspiration. **14:** The final line of the poem is missing. Ben-Ari points out that it would likely provide the link to the poem’s specific place in the liturgy.

#### YOU LIE IN MY PALACE

SQ, #131; HaShira, #99:4. A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. Scheindlin observes that this is one of the more obscure poems on redemption by Ibn Gabirol (there are thirteen in all), and that the text at some point might be corrupt (*The Gazelle*, pp. 93–103). In any event, in its ambiguous current form, it appears that *Knesset Yisrael* (the congregation of Israel—grammatically feminine) is asking a complacent God (who is resting, as the allusion would have it, between the cherubim of the ark) to prepare her bed for the *admoni*, the “ruddy one”—an expression that alludes to 1 Samuel 16:12 and implies the Messiah, the “anointed one.” In the second stanza God is addressed as the lover, not the go-between. Finally, the logistics of the poem are somewhat confusing, as God is, at the beginning of the poem, inside the palace but inactive, but at the end of the poem the congregation of Israel calls Him to enter the palace. (Another possibility is that the address shifts to the “ruddy one,” the Messiah, whom the poet longs for, calling him “my fine gazelle.”) The final call to the lover to drink at dawn, Scheindlin notes, “echoes countless Arabic and Hebrew wine poems.” **Line 1:** 1 Samuel 4:4: “The Lord of hosts, who sitteth upon the cherubim”; Exodus 25:18; Amos 6:4; Esther 1:6. **3:** 1 Samuel 16:12: “And Samuel said unto Jesse: ‘Send and fetch [David] . . .’ And he sent and brought him. Now he was ruddy and withal had beautiful eyes, and was goodly to look upon.” The Hebrew uses the characteristic “ruddy,” which would be awkward in the English; I’ve shifted the allusion to the next term of the *shibbutz*. See also Song of Songs 5:10: “My beloved is white and ruddy,” which the Targum explains as: “Then the ecclesia of Israel began to speak about the praise of the Lord of the World, saying, ‘It is God I desire to worship, for by

day He wears a robe white as snow . . . and His face is radiant as fire from the greatness of his wisdom'” (trans. Scheindlin). **4:** Song of Songs 2:9: “My beloved is like a gazelle.” **5:** Psalms 44:24. **6:** Isaiah 13:2: “Set ye up an ensign upon the high mountain.” The Hebrew specifies Mount Hermon and (or) Senir, from which the Land of Israel can be seen. **7:** Numbers 16:26; Genesis 16:12: “And he [Ishmael] shall be a wild ass of a man.” **8:** Proverbs 5:19: “A lovely hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times.” **9:** Song of Songs 6:3: “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.” **10–12:** “Chambers” is actually “palace” in the original, the same word that appears in line 1. Song of Songs 8:2: “I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother’s house, that thou might instruct me; I would cause thee to drink of the spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.”

From *KINGDOM’S CROWN*

*Keter Malkhut*, ed. Y. A. Zeidman (Jerusalem, 1950); SQ, #22; *HaShira*, #108. *Kingdom’s Crown* is essentially a *baqasha*, or poem of petition, though its hybrid composition renders it in many ways unique in Hebrew literature. While it is doubtful that the poem was originally intended for synagogue use, its powerful religious emphases have led to its incorporation into the rite for the Day of Atonement, on which it is uttered quietly by individual worshipers. Current practice varies from community to community.

There are three parts to the poem: part 1 opens with an address to the Creator that gives poetic expression to the philosophical thought of *The Fountain of Life* (cantos 1–9); part 2 is a detailed (Ptolemaic) cosmology (cantos 10–32); and part 3 is a percussive confession (*vidu’i*) of human failings that returns the speaker/reader to God (cantos 33–40). My rendering of the poem takes its cue from the graphic arrangement of Y. A. Zeidman’s definitive, and out-of-print, 1950 edition *Keter Malkhut* (Jerusalem, 1950). Zeidman’s great innovation was to set the poem out in lines that highlight the rhyme and rhythmic movement of the cantos (whose prosody differs considerably from that of the monorhymed and metrical lyrics in this volume). Zeidman’s method emphasizes the symphonic nature of the work—something that the standard and prayer book editions obscure. For more on the formal aspects of the poem, as well as translation of the poem in its entirety, see *saj’*, in glossary at the back of this volume, and Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 137–95, 289–90.

★

*Epigraph*

**Lines 1–2:** Job 2:21, 24:9; *Pirquei Avot* 2:2: “For the merit of their fathers is their support.” **5–6:** Literally, “I’ve set it over [at the head of] all my hymns, and called it *Kingdom’s Crown*, [or ‘the crown of the kingdom’].” With this translation of the title I have tried to emphasize the overall and abiding sense of majesty-in-creation—God’s, but also the poet’s—while maintaining the abstract aspects of

the register and its esoteric implications. Possible sources for the title include *Pirquei R. Eliezer* 23 and Esther 2:17.

from Part I: Prologue

**Canto I. Line 1:** Psalms 139:14. **2–5:** *Netzah* has been variously translated as “triumph,” “victory,” “glory,” and “eternity.” I Chronicles 29:11; I Samuel 19:29. I have followed the medieval commentator David Qimhi in his *Book of Roots*, where he says it implies “authority and might [or glory].” **6–7:** Psalms 102:27. **8–9:** Literally, “within whose counsel our ideas cannot stand”—Jeremiah 23:18. **11–12:** Habakkuk 3:4; Proverbs 25:2. Zeidman points out that *sod* and *yesod*—literally, “mystery/secret” and “foundation”—here stand for “form” and “matter,” key terms in Ibn Gabirol’s philosophical scheme. **13:** I.e., the four letters of the Name of God. *Qiddushin* 71a for the rabbis on Exodus 3:15, where a change of vocalization in “This is my name forever (*l’olam*)” turns “forever” into “to be kept silent [secret] (*l’alem*)”; also *Exodus Rabbah* 3:9. The knowledge of how to pronounce the four letters no longer resides with the wise. **14:** Job 26:7. **15:** Job 28:11. **16–17:** I.e., “your creatures.” Psalms 31:20. **18–21:** Psalms 102:27–28; Isaiah 6:1. See part 2, canto 24 for the location of the throne in the tenth sphere. **22–25:** The translation follows Zeidman’s gloss, especially “light’s reflection.” Lamentations 4:20; *Fountain of Life* 5:41: “And the impression of form in matter, when it reaches it from the Will, is like the return of the form of the one who gazes into a mirror at his reflection there.” Literally, “the hidden dwelling in the secret heavenly place.” **26–30:** This world and the world-to-come. *Pirquei Avot* 2:21: “He used to say: The work is not upon thee to finish, nor art thou free to desist from it. . . . Faithful is the master of thy work who will pay thee the wages of thy toil. And know that the giving of the reward to the righteous is in the time to come.” Also the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* 1, which Yarden cites (p. 43): “And they have said in the books of wisdom: This world is a bridge. Cross over it into the world-to-come [the Hereafter]. . . . For this world is a house of action, the one to come a house of reward.” **31:** Exodus 2:2: “And when she saw that he [Moses] was a goodly child, she hid him”; here the words refer to God and the reward to come. See also *Hagigah* 12a, which glosses the verse from Genesis, “And God saw the light, that it was good”—this being the primary light that could be seen from “one end of the world to the other,” but which, after witnessing the corrupt generation of the flood and the dispersion, God hid and reserved for the righteous.

**Canto VII. Line 1:** Psalms 36:10. **2–5:** Isaiah 59:2; Lamentations 3:44. **6–8:** The reading follows Zeidman; other Hebrew editions read: “will be revealed in the upper world of beauty.” Genesis 22:14. Also *Ta’anit* 31a. **9–12:** Isaiah 60:19: “The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light”; Numbers 23:3: “Thou shalt see but the uttermost part of them and shalt not see them all.”

**Canto IX.** This entire section reverberates against the “autobiography of wisdom” as it is set forth in Proverbs 8, especially 22–31: “The Lord made me as the beginning of His way, the first of His works of old.” **Lines 1–4:** Proverbs 16:22;

Jeremiah 10:14; Psalms 36:10, which also explicitly mentions the “fountain of life” that gives the poet’s major philosophical work its title. **7:** Proverbs 8:30; **8–10:** Isaiah 40:14. **11–13:** Shelomo Pines calls these and the following lines “among the most remarkable” of the poem (“‘He Called to Nothing, Which Split’: On *Keter Malkhut*” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 50 (1980): 339–47). *Genesis Rabbah* 1:2: “I was an instrument of the artistry of the Holy One, blessed be He”; Zeidman adds: “like a workman and artist [or artisan] with whose help the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world.” See note to lines 20–22. **14–15:** *Sefer Yetzira* 2:6: “He formed substance out of chaos, and made nonexistence into existence.” “According to Empedocles, vision was occasioned by particles continually flying off the surface of bodies which met with others proceeding from the eye” (*Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, trans. I. Zangwill, ed. I. Davidson [Philadelphia, 1923], p. 178). **16–19:** In the Hebrew the active agency and grammatical subject of these lines is God’s desire (line 12) or will. Emanating from God, this desire works like an artist, or artisan, to give shape to the world. Zeidman cites (p. 23) the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*: “And know, my brother! Every flesh-and-blood artist has need of six things in order to complete his work. . . . Primary matter, place, time, tool, vessel, and movement. . . . ; whereas the exalted Lord has no need of any of these, all of which are his creations and works.” Proverbs 9:1; *Sefer Yetzira* 1:12: “Fire from water, with it He engraved and carved the throne of glory”; Malachi 3:3. **20–22:** The interruption of part 1’s anaphora—“you are the . . .”—by “He called” signals the transition to part 2 of the poem, the cosmology. **23–26:** The imagery here is taken from the description of the wilderness sanctuary in Exodus. Exodus 26:4; Isaiah 44:24; Exodus 36:17: “And he made fifty loops upon the edge of the curtain that was outmost in the first coupling [set],” where “coupling” is understood, by Zeidman, as referring to the system of the spheres. In the scheme laid out here, God’s desire or will—literally, “the power [of his/its hand]” (Ibn Gabirol identifies God’s will as “the power of unification”)—reaches from the highest “innermost chamber” of the tenth sphere (canto 24) to the “outermost edge” of the lower creation, with earth at its center. See also Isaiah 40:12: “Who has . . . meted out the heavens with his span.”

*from Part II: The Cosmology*

Readers of *Kingdom’s Crown* have long had a certain prejudice against this section of the poem. The rabbis of the Middle Ages were concerned about its confusion of science and religion; twentieth-century teachers have suggested that students would be more interested in the emotionalism of parts 1 and 3, and that the detail of part 2 was something of an acquired taste. To my mind, it is precisely the musical and physical detail of part 2 that establishes the palpable sense of grandeur and kingdom that are central to the poem.

**Canto X. Line 1:** Part 2 begins at the center of the Ptolemaic universe, with the sublunary sphere—the globe of earth and water surrounded by air and fire. The poem then begins its ascent up through the ten spheres of the moon,

Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars (the zodiac), the all-encompassing (diurnal) sphere, and the sphere of intelligence (the source of angels). Above this tenth sphere is the “place of the souls of the righteous after death,” universal matter, the Throne of Glory, and the “Effulgence of Divine Glory: the Source of Soul” (see R. Loewe, *Ibn Gabirol* [New York, 1989], p. 114). Psalms 106:2. **2:** Zeidman notes that the notion of the earth as a sphere appears in the Jerusalem Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 3:1): “It is said: The earth is made like a ball . . . R. Yonah said: Alexander of Macedon, when he asked to ascend on high and ascended on high, rose until he saw the earth as a ball and the seas as a bowl”; the full term “ball of earth,” he notes, was renewed in Hebrew by Ibn Gabirol. Prior to that it appears, of course, in Pythagoras, and the Muslim cosmographers drew on earlier Greek sources. *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (cited in Loewe, *Ibn Gabirol*, p. 181): “The parts of the water were lighter than the parts of the land and the water stood over the land. And since the parts of the wind were lighter than the water the wind was set over the water.” **3:** For more on Ibn Gabirol’s treatment of the elements, see his early ethical treatise *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities*. **4:** In an effort to establish a sense of motion and dimension, and to maintain the musical flow of the poem, I have varied the English for *galgal* throughout—here “wheel,” but a few lines later “circle,” or “circuit,” and elsewhere “sphere.” **5:** Ecclesiastes 1:6. **10:** Ibn Gabirol, *Fountain of Life* 1:5: “The universal essence . . . is not unified, however, . . . it is reduced to two principles . . . the universal matter and universal form.” **11:** Hosea 2:2: “And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint themselves one head, and shall go up out of the land.” The *shibbutz* again employs the biblical phrase in a different context entirely. **13:** Genesis 2:10: “And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became four heads.” Avraham Ibn Ezra’s commentary (M. Friedlander, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra* [London, n. d.], p. 40) reads as follows: “And now I will reveal to you by allusion the secret of the garden and the rivers. . . . And I have not found this matter discussed by any of the sages except R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, who was a great sage and saw into the matters of the soul’s mystery. . . . And the ‘river’—is like a mother (which is to say, the universal natural common matter) to all bodies; and the ‘four heads’ [fonts]—are the roots [the elements of fire, wind, water, dust].” In the standard editions of his commentary Ibn Ezra writes: “And he who understands this mystery will understand how the river diverges.”

**Canto XIV. Lines 1–5:** Isaiah 61:10. **6–8:** As Raphael Loewe has demonstrated, the measurements Ibn Gabirol refers to are remarkably close to modern computations throughout the poem. For precise figures see Loewe’s *Ibn Gabirol* and the notes to the poem in Cole, *Selected Gabirol*. **9:** *Baraita de Shmu’el HaQatan* 9: “Venus is appointed over charm and grace and love, and over passion and desire and fruitfulness and over increase of humankind and beasts, and over the fruit of the land and the fruit of the tree”; *Ketubah* 8a: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, . . . who

hast created joy and gladness, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing and song, mirth and delight.” 15–16: Deuteronomy 33:14: “precious things of the fruits of the sun . . . and the precious things of the yield of the moon.”

**Canto XVI. Lines 1–4:** This canto is still about the sun. Genesis 1:14. 4–8: Genesis 1:12; Job 38:31; *Genesis Rabbah* 10:6: “R. Simon said: There is not a single herb that does not have a constellation in heaven which strikes it and says, ‘Grow,’ . . . R. Hannina b. Papa and R. Simon said: Pleiades binds the fruit and Orion draws it out between knot and knot, as it is written, ‘*Canst thou lead forth the constellations in season?*’ (Job 38:32). R. Tanhum b. R. Hiyya and R. Simon said: The constellation which ripens the fruits.” 24: Psalms 78:4. 26: Daniel 1:4. 28: Genesis 24:10: “All the goods of his master [Abraham] were in his hand.” Ratzhaby notes the Arabic proverb from which the line might also derive: “The power of the servant [derives] from the power of his lord.”

**Canto XXIV. Line 4:** 1 Kings 6:17: “The house, that is, the Temple, before [the Sanctuary]”—where the Hebrew for Temple is *heikhal*, and might also be translated “palace” or “chamber.” 5: Leviticus 27:32: “Every tenth . . . shall be holy to the Lord.” 9: Habakkuk 3:4. 10–13: Song of Songs 3:9–10. “Throne” (*matzava*) or “base” has a variant reading, *misba*, “couch” or “table”—Song of Songs 1:12: “while the king sat at his table.” 15–16: Genesis 4:7: “unto thee is its desire.”

**Canto XXVII. Lines 1–3:** *Shabbat* 152b: “R. Eliezer said: The souls of the righteous are hidden under the Throne of Glory.” 4–6: 1 Samuel 25:29. 7–9: Isaiah 40:31; Job 3:17; *Genesis Rabbah* 9:7; Esther 9:16. The verse involves a play on Genesis 9:19: “The sons of Noah”; *no’ah* also means “rest” in Esther 9:16. 11: *Berakhot* 17a on the pleasures of the world to come; cf. below (line 16). 14: Exodus 38:8. 16–20: Descriptions of the world to come and its pleasures abound in rabbinic literature. See, for an elaborate example, *Yalqut Shim’oni* to Genesis (in Zeidman). A more concise description is found in *Berakhot* 17a: “In the future world there is no eating nor drinking nor propagation nor business nor jealousy nor hatred nor competition, but the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads feasting on the brightness of the divine presence, as it says, *And they beheld God, and did eat and drink* (Exodus 24:11).” Also Avraham Ibn Hasdai’s *Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 35, on the pleasures of the “world of intelligence and mind, which have absolutely nothing in common with any other kind of pleasure.” 21–24: Numbers 13:27: “A land [that]. . . floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it.”

**Canto XXVIII. Lines 1–4:** The translation follows Zeidman’s commentary. 5–6: *Hagigah* 12b: “*Araboth* is that in which there are Right and Judgment and Righteousness; the treasures of life and the heavens of peace and the heavens of blessing, the souls of the righteous and the spirits and the souls which are yet to be born.” 7–8: Isaiah 59:20. 9–10: Isaiah 30:33; Ezekiel 38:22; Hosea 6:7; *Yalqut Shim’oni*, Ecclesiastes, 976: “He created the Garden of Eden [beside] Gehinnom so that one could be saved from the other, and what is the space between them? R. Haninah said: A wall the width of a hand-breadth.” 11–13: Proverbs 22:14. 14–19: Zechariah 14:6; Job 24:15; Deuteronomy 4:11; Genesis 15:17; *Hagigah* 12b.

20–23: Habakkuk 1:2: “O Lord, Thou hast ordained them for judgment, and Thou, O Rock, hast established them for correction”; Job 37:13: “They are turned about by His guidance. . . . Whether it be for correction, or for His earth, or for mercy, that He cause it to come.”

**Canto XXIX. Lines 1–5:** Ezekiel 28:7, 28:17; Isaiah 51:1. **6–10:** Numbers 11:17. **11–14:** Psalms 29:7; Isaiah 30:33; Genesis 2:15; Exodus 3:2: “The bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.” **15–16:** See note to canto 9, line 14; Exodus 19:18: “Now Mount Sinai was altogether in smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire.”

**Canto XXXI. Lines 4–5:** Proverbs 15:22; Jonah 4:6. **6–7:** Job 33:6; Genesis 2:7. **8:** Numbers 11:17. **11–12:** Literally, “you’ve shut him [man].” Likewise in the following two lines, where the translation continues the first person plural. **13–14:** Exodus 25:11: “Within and without shalt thou overlay it,” where Ibn Gabirol plays both on *titzapenu* (“thou shalt overlay it”)—taking it to mean “thou shalt see it” (also *titzapenu*)—and on “within” (the body/the home) and “without.”

from Part III: Confession

**Canto XXXIII.** Having ascended as high as one might ascend, and mapped the cosmos, the poem now picks up where the final cantos of part 2 left off, with the link between God, man, and man’s conduct in the world. **Lines 1–4:** Ezra 9:6; Jeremiah 22:22. Also *Berakhot* 17a: “Raba on concluding his prayer added the following: My God, before I was formed I was not worthy [to be formed] and now that I have been formed I am as if I had not been formed. I am dust in my lifetime, all the more in my death. Behold, I am before Thee like a vessel full of shame and confusion.” **12–13:** Job 7:5; Genesis 2:7. **14:** Habakkuk 2:19: “Woe to him that says to the wood ‘Awake!’; to the dumb stone, ‘Arise!’” **15:** Psalms 144:4. **16:** Psalms 78:39. **17:** Psalms 140:4. **18:** I.e., a heart uncircumcised, as in Jeremiah 9:25. See also Jeremiah 17:9. **19:** Proverbs 19:19. **20–22:** Proverbs 6:18, 14:12, 19:2, 28:18; Isaiah 6:5; Psalms 101:5. **23–26:** *Yoma* 87b: “What are we, and what is our life?”; Isaiah 40:17; Deuteronomy 31:27. **27:** *Pirquei Avot* 3:1: “Know whence thou camest, and whither thou art going, and before whom thou art destined to give account and reckoning.” **28–29:** Esther 4:16. *Ta’anit* 7b: “Any man who is insolent stumbles in the end.” **30–33:** Ezekiel 6:9, 22:24. **34–35:** *Pirquei Avot* 1:13: “A name that is widespread loses its fame; one who does not add [to his knowledge] causes [it] to cease.”

**Canto XL. Line 4:** Cf. The liturgy for the Day of Atonement, *Avinu Malkeinu*: “Our father, our King, be gracious unto us and answer us, though we have no worthy deeds.” **5–10:** Nehemiah 5:13; Isaiah 24; Hosea 10:1; Esther 8:5; 1 Kings 8:38. **14ff.:** The liturgy for the Day of Atonement—“May it be Thy will . . . again in Thine abundant compassion to have mercy upon us and upon Thy Sanctuary.” The syntax in the Hebrew is somewhat unusual as well. **17:** Genesis 45:10. **18:** Zeidman has: “Remember me in the order of peace.” **19–20:** Psalms 4:7; Numbers 6:25–26, and the Priestly Blessing: “The Lord make His face [to] shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee, the Lord lift up His countenance to thee and

give thee peace.” **21–22:** Psalms 103:10, 39:9. **23–24:** Psalms 102:25, 27:9. **25–26:** Psalms 51:4, 51:13. **27–28:** Psalms 71:20, 73:24. **29–33:** Genesis 15:1; Hosea 11:7. **34–36:** Psalms 17:14. **37–39:** Job 33:30; Psalms 89:16, 71:20. **41–42:** Isaiah 12:1. **43–45:** Psalms 62:13. **46–47:** The morning liturgy for Shabbat and festivals, *U’bemaqhalot*: “For this is the duty of all creatures towards Thee, O Lord . . . to give thanks unto Thee, to laud, adore, and praise Thee.” **48–55:** The morning liturgy for Shabbat and Festivals, *Shokhen ‘ad*: “It is befitting for the upright to praise Him . . .,” etc. The lines of the poem follow the outline of the prayer. “Hallowed in the mouth of the holy” is, literally, “the mouth of those who hallow (sanctify) you,” i.e., the holy ones, as in the prayer. **56–57:** Psalms 86:8: “For there is none like unto Thee among the gods, O Lord, and there are no works like Thine.” **58–61:** These lines incorporate elements of the end of the *‘amida* prayer and Psalms 19:15: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before Thee, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

#### YITZHAQ IBN GHIYYAT

##### MY WANDERING

Shirei R. Yitzhaq Ibn Ghiyyat, ed. Y. David (Jerusalem, 1987), #98; *HaShira* #127. A *ge’ula* in the form of a *muwashshah*. Schirmann, who calls this “a remarkable poem,” notes that it takes to an extreme the notion that the hardships forced on the people of Israel are in fact its greatest source of pleasure and hope. As such, it echoes the *Udhri* tradition of Arabic love poetry, where suffering in love is central. (See Yehuda HaLevi, “Love’s Dwelling” and the commentary there.) **Line 3:** Exodus 6:5. **6:** Proverbs 23:13. **8:** Proverbs 3:11. **9–10:** Isaiah 52:2. **13:** Lamentations 3:19. **18:** Literally, “they incense me with no-god,” as in Deuteronomy 32:21. **33–34:** Numbers 33:55; Isaiah 17:11. **35:** God is the speaker in the final stanza. **40:** The pronoun in the Hebrew is “it” (or “him”)—literally, “I’ll place him.” Schirmann comments that it refers to “my love,” or “he who loves me,” i.e., the people of Israel, which the Lord will set over all other peoples. I have inserted the third-person plural for clarity, as both “it” “him” would be confusing. **44:** Deuteronomy 28:65.

#### YOSEF IBN SAHL

##### THE FLEAS

Schirmann, *Shirim Hadashim min HaGeniza*, p. 212. This is the first of several highly entertaining flea (or fly) poems in the medieval Hebrew tradition. See also Abraham Ibn Ezra’s “The Flies” and Alahdab’s “Another Flea,” as well as Alharizi’s hilarious prose passage about fleas in the *Tahkemoni* (Gate 4—not translated here). **Line 6:** Isaiah 8:12. **10:** 2 Samuel 5:24. **14:** Song of Songs 6:11.

## YOUR POEM, MY FRIEND

*Sefunei Shira*, ed. D. Yarden (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 24; *BeLashon Qodmim*, ed. S. Abramson (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 76. The heading indicates that this poem was one of three written in response to Moshe Ibn Ezra's having asked Ibn Sahl for his opinion about a new poem of his (of Ibn Ezra's). The Hebrew contains an odd use of the plural in an incomplete construct state, which contributes to its light tone. Abramson suggests that its final rhyme be read as *sie* (rhymes with "high") rather than *say* (rhymes with "day"). Yarden adjusts the Hebrew to read *soe* in each case, but Abramson says this is incorrect. **Line 1:** Song of Songs 4:9. **2:** Proverbs 7:22. **4:** Numbers 31:28. **5:** Job 40:25. **6:** Isaiah 40:4; Psalms 31:21.

## A COMPLAINT ABOUT THE RICH

*HaShira*, #142, lines 1–8. Another response to the poem Ibn Ezra had shown him. Ibn Sahl begins with a complaint about the state of cultural affairs in their day. That complaint continues for another four lines in the Hebrew, and the remainder of the poem (another twenty lines) praises Ibn Ezra's poem, which Ibn Sahl says saved him from the boors that surround him; he then exhorts his friend to be strong, although he too is surrounded by people he can't bear. **Lines 1–4:** Lamentations 4:1. With the somewhat ironic quotation, the poet implicitly likens the cultural situation to the ruin of Jerusalem. **10:** Proverbs 8:18. **14:** Psalms 49:18. **15–16:** Lamentations 5:2; Obadiah 1:11.

## LEVI IBN ALTABBAAN

Ibn Altabbaan's poems were so accomplished in their way that they were often confused with HaLevi's. See, for example, HaLevi's "If Only Dawn."

## UTTER HIS ONENESS

*Shirei Levi Ibn Altabbaan*, ed. D. Pagis (Jerusalem, 1967), #2; *HaShira*, #130:1. *Reshut* to the *nishmat*. Acrostic: *Levi*. The poet calls to the soul to put the agony of ceaseless contrition behind it for now and take up instead the path of devotional delight. **Line 1:** The image of the blood alludes to Isaiah 59:3: "For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity." Schirmann suggests that it derives from the conventional image (in secular Arabic verse) of the weeping tears mingled with blood, indicating that they come from the heart. Also 2 Samuel 20:12. **2:** Psalms 51:7. **3:** Lamentations 2:19. **4:** Isaiah 59:15; Psalms 76:6. **5–6:** Psalms 150:6, 146:1.

## EXPOSED

*Shirei Levi Ibn Altabbaan*, #3; *HaShira* #130:2. *Reshut leBarekhu*. Acrostic: *Levi*. **Line 1:** Isaiah 51:23. **2:** Ezekiel 16:22: “when you were naked and bare, and lay wallowing in your own blood.” **4:** Lamentations 2:18. **6:** Literally, “so long as your spirit is in your nose.” Psalms 104:33: “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” And from the liturgy: “As long as the soul [*neshama*—like ‘breath,’ *neshima*] is in me, I offer my thanks before you”; “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

## BAHYA IBN PAQUDA

Ibn Tibbon’s less than felicitous translation of *Duties of the Heart* was so popular that it displaced the Arabic original, and the book has since been translated into numerous languages, often multiple times. It was one of the first Hebrew books to be printed (1489, in Naples).

## DUTIES OF THE HEART

Bahya Ibn Paquda, *Hovot HaLevavot* [Duties of the Heart], trans. from the Arabic into the Hebrew by Yehuda Ibn Tibbon, ed. A. Tzafroni (Tel Aviv, 1964), p. 584. See also Menahem Mansoor’s English translation, *The Book of Direction to the Duties of the Heart* (London, 1973), p. 447. The ten couplets of the poem summarize the ten chapters of the book, so that the poem acts as both a table of contents and mnemonic device for meditation on its themes, with its acrostic spelling out the poet’s name: *Bahya Bar Yosef*. The chapters are (1) The Unity of God; (2) Creation and God’s Grace Which Is Revealed in It; (3) The Obligations of Service and Obedience; (4) Trust in God; (5) Pure Devotion; (6) Humility; (7) Repentance; (8) Spiritual Accounting; (9) Asceticism; and (10) True Love of God.

## MOSHE IBN EZRA

While in the north, notes Raymond Scheindlin, the poet “diverts the language of Jewish aspiration for national restoration to his personal longing for al-Andalus, the home of the Judeo-Arab synthesis.” For a detailed discussion of Ibn Ezra’s life and work, see Scheindlin’s cogent article on him in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. M. R. Menocal, R. Scheindlin, M. Sells (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 252–64.

## WEAK WITH WINE

*SHIE*, #116; *HaShira*, #145:1. **Heading:** “And he wrote, describing a meadow where violets were growing.” **Lines 1–2:** Literally, “weak with the wine of love”

or “the wine of friendship,” implying the party, and in line 2, “lacking the power to get up and walk.” Isaiah 28:1; 1 Samuel 17:39. **3–4:** Song of Songs 7:13, 4:16; Exodus 30:24, 34. **5–6:** Numbers 4:6. The Hebrew has *tekhelet*, which can stand for any number of shades; in this case it appears to be a deep blue bordering on violet.

#### THE GARDEN

*Moshe Ibn Ezra: Shirei HaHol*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1935), #1 (hereafter *SHIE*). This poem opens the standard Hebrew edition of Ibn Ezra’s work, edited by Haim Brody. It employs the Arab rhetorical figure of the boast (*fakhr*), but in a particularly gentle manner. **Lines 1–2:** Lamentations 5:17; Zephaniah 1:14; Jeremiah 48:36. **3–4:** Isaiah 14:7. **5–6:** Ink and paper were sometimes scented, especially when used for poems that were dispatched to friends. Scripture also associates sweetness and scent with what is written, as in God’s ordinances (Psalms 19:11). **7–8:** Isaiah 35:5–6, 32:4.

#### BRING ME MY CUP

*SHIE*, #226; *HaShira*, #145:5. **Lines 1–2:** Jeremiah 6:4; Song of Songs 2:17 and 4:6. **3–4:** Brody notes in one place that “its” refers to the sun, which changes color as it sets, and in another place that it refers to the cup, which is changed by the addition of the wine. Schirmann says it refers to the sun. Nehemiah 2:2.

#### A SHADOW

*SHIE*, #19; *HaShira*, #145:2. **Lines 1–2:** Job 14:2; Song of Songs 2:11. Literally, “with his horsemen and chariots,” as in Exodus 14:23. **3–4:** Psalms 19:7; Song of Songs 1:12. **5–6:** Exodus 29:9. **7–8:** Job 31:33. **11–12:** Esther 1:12; Isaiah 10:16. Wine was usually mixed with water, to reduce its potency; here the tears replace the water. **13–16:** Jeremiah 37:9. **17–18:** Jeremiah 6:4; Proverbs 26:23. **19–20:** Genesis 25:26: “And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau’s heel.”

#### THE FAWN

*SHIE*, #136.

#### THE GARDEN, THE MISER

*SHIE*, #34. **Lines 1–2:** Genesis 39:11, which emphasizes the festive nature of the occasion, singling out this day as special. Literally, “My friend, the time/season has been made new, and the flower beds live on as the day after death.” **4:** Exodus 26:1. **6:** Lamentations 3:49. **7–8:** Isaiah 38:14; Jeremiah 8:7; Ezekiel 7:16; Isaiah 59:11. **10:** Literally, “the vine’s daughter.”

## THE PEN

*SHIE*, #196. **Lines 1–2:** Nehemiah 2:5; Isaiah 10:11 **6:** The mind of one who sees it. **7:** The paper seems to suck at the pen out of thirst. **9–10:** Jeremiah 23:29, 5:13.

## HEART'S DESIRE

*SHIE*, #249; *HaShira*, #143:1. A *muwashshah*. Ibn Ezra's erotic poems are especially sensual, and this poem has one of medieval Hebrew poetry's more explicit depictions of the sex act itself (lines 27ff.)—or at least what sounds like the sex act. There is considerable disagreement about the tone, nature, and fundamental meaning of this poem. In this way it resembles Ibn Khalfun's "Love in Me Stirs," HaGorni's "Lament," and Shelomo HaLevi's "Memory's Wine"—all of which, again, highlight the elusive aspect of this poetry. Scheindlin suggests that it involves a "frivolous" treatment of philosophical notions about an ideal, Platonic plane of pleasure, and notes that the seduction was not successful. Schirmann states that the poem is in fact quite explicit about the pleasures of love and its consummation (and that the fawn then regrets what he did). Perhaps because of the allusion to the heterosexual situation of the Song of Songs 3:4 in lines 25–26, Pagis, Schirmann, and Fleischer say the love interest in the poem is most likely a woman, even though the poem presents the *tzvi* as masculine. Matti Huss, however, takes the designation at face value. In his *Book of Discussion*, Ibn Ezra expresses the standard regret over having composed "obscene" and "frivolous" poems when he was young. He says he wrote such poems rarely and without great enthusiasm and that in any event doing so was wrong (57a and 143a–b). **Lines 1–4:** Psalms 21:3; 1 Kings 20:6. **5–10:** Psalms 49:15. **11–14:** Or, "and feed me," 1 Samuel 2:29. **15–20:** Numbers 32:7; Proverbs 5:19; Ezekiel 48:35: "The Lord is there." **25–26:** Literally, "to his mother's home." Song of Songs 3:4: "We rose and went to his mother's house," which allegorically was interpreted in the Targum and the rabbinic tradition as referring to the Temple. Genesis 49:15; Isaiah 9:3. **35–44:** Lamentations 1:14; Job 33:10, 35:16; Deuteronomy 3:26. **45–54:** Ezra 9:14; Genesis 23:8.

## THAT BITTER DAY

*SHIE*, #101; *HaShira*, #153:1. Like "The Dove," "Why Does Time Hound Me So" and "If You See Me," this poem was clearly written after the poet's forced and mysterious departure from Granada and his emigration to the far less cultured north. **Lines 1–2:** Habakkuk 1:6. **3–4:** Or, "I dwell among boors." Ezra 9:3; Psalms 142:5; Genesis 24:49; Isaiah 50:2.

## LET MAN REMEMBER

*SHIE*, #68; *HaShira*, #161:1. **Lines 5–6:** Psalms 18:11. Elitzur (*Shirat HaHol*, pp. 167–69) points out the subtle way in which the poet has loaded each pair of lines

with antitheses, so that each positive thing is made to equal its opposite, and life itself is seen in this contemplative context as a gradual death.

#### THE DOVE

*SHIE*, #154; *HaShira*, #151. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi comments on the way in which Ibn Ezra's poems from the north express a nostalgia "for the lost paradise of his beloved Granada" and a hope of return "at least as intense" as the expression of his longing for Zion in his liturgical poems ("Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel [New York, 1997], p. 16). Again, see Scheindlin on the conflation of personal longing and national restoration ("Moshe Ibn Ezra," in Menocal et al., *The Literature of al-Andalus*, p. 253). **Heading:** "And he said when he heard a dove cooing on a branch." **Lines 1–2:** Leviticus 12:6; Isaiah 17:6. **3–6:** Isaiah 58:11; Jonah 4:6; Deuteronomy 6:7; Judges 4:5. **7–10:** Isaiah 43:6; Deuteronomy 18:10–11. **11–12:** Ezekiel 32:18; Isaiah 35:2; Jeremiah 31:17; Proverbs 26:2. **13–14:** Psalms 55:7: "O that I had wings like a dove; then I might fly away and be at rest"; Psalms 102:15: "For Thy servants take pleasure in her [Zion's] stones, and love [cherish] her dust."

#### WHY DOES TIME HOUND ME SO

*SHIE*, #36; *HaShira*, #152. **Heading:** "And he said when he was brought by the enemies' guile to a cliff on the highest mountain in Castile." It isn't clear why Ibn Ezra would have been imprisoned, but it may have had something to do with his having been associated with the ruling powers in Granada. **Lines 1–2:** Literally, "wake early." Proverbs 27:8; Judges 7:3; 2 Kings 21:8. **6:** Psalms 102:8: "I am become like a sparrow that is alone upon the housetop." **7–8:** For the most part, the untamed natural landscape held little fascination for the poets of Muslim Spain, and most of their "nature" poems (poems of description) concern a combination of the natural and the cultivated (Elitzur, *Shirat HaHol*, p. 433). Micah 1:8; Jeremiah 31:17–18. **9–10:** Micah 1:16: "Enlarge thy baldness as the vulture, for they are gone into captivity from thee"; i.e., even the vulture or eagle, seeing my state, would pull its hair out and enlarge its baldness out of sadness for me. "Cut themselves"—as a sign of mourning, as in Jeremiah 16:6; Deuteronomy 14:1. **11–14:** These lines echo the Arabic motif of shepherding the stars, and indicate both his utter solitude and his longing for his friends far away. Psalms 144:2, 139:3; Jeremiah 31:6; Genesis 22:17. **15–16:** I.e., the land of Christian Spain, as opposed to Granada and Muslim Spain. Isaiah 51:19; Psalms 20:9.

#### ANCIENT GRAVES

*SHIE*, #152; *HaShira*, #161:8. **Lines 1–4:** Jeremiah 51:39, 57; Ecclesiastes 9:6.

## IF YOU SEE ME

*SHIE*, #210; *HaShira*, #161:9. **Lines 1–4:** Joshua 6:1. **5–6:** Daniel 10:8; Job 7:5, 21:26. **7–8:** Lamentations 4:8; Job 30:30. **9–10:** Psalms 69:9; Genesis 31:15. **13–14:** Ecclesiastes 2:14; Isaiah 10:25; Deuteronomy 12:5; Exodus 29:46. **15–16:** Job 18:13; Ecclesiastes 9:5. **17–18:** Ecclesiastes 6:3; Genesis 15:2; *Nedarim* 64b: “R. Joshua b. Levi said: A man who is childless is accounted as dead, for it is written, Give me children, or else I am dead [Gen 30:1]. And it was taught: Four are accounted as dead: a poor man, a leper, a blind person, and one who is childless.”

## IVORY PALACES

*SHIE*, #90; *HaShira*, #161:6. **Lines 1–2:** Literally, “[All] who build homes of ivory. . .” 1 Kings 22:39: “The ivory house that [Ahab] built”; Amos 3:15: “The ivory palaces shall be demolished”; Isaiah 2:16. **3–4:** 2 Chronicles 3:15. **5–6:** I.e., without an inhabitant. Jeremiah 9:10; Isaiah 24:12; Amos 6:8. **7–8:** Literally, “Say [you who hear me now], where are those who built and dwelled, and where are their souls and their bodies?” **9–10:** Job 27:8, 17:13–15: “I must look forward to Sheol as my home.” **11–12:** 2 Kings 3:4; Genesis 22:10.

## THE WORLD

*SHIE*, #14; *HaShira*, #161:2. The poem presents the somewhat heretical implication that God set up man’s instinct for transgression from the start. A similar suggestion is cunningly put forth in Ibn Gabirol’s “Before My Being.” The origin of the poem’s central image is *Kalila and Dimna* and also appears in *Choice of Pearls*, trans. A. Cohen (New York, 1925), #522. **Lines 1–2:** Genesis 5:1–2; Ecclesiastes 3:11: “He hath set the world in their heart, so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning to the end”; 2 Chronicles 35:25. **4:** *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:3: “No man leaves the world with even half his desire in hand.” **5–8:** Ezekiel 47:11; Jeremiah 10:13; Psalms 104:11.

## MY HEART’S SECRET

*SHIE*, #102; *HaShira*, #161:5. **Lines 1–2:** Malachi 1:9; Proverbs 25:9. **3–4:** Genesis 39:26; Habakkuk 2:18; 1 Samuel 18:23. **5:** The world of time and pleasure and materiality (*tevel*) is always feminine in the medieval Hebrew (and Arabic) context.

## I ROUSED MY THOUGHTS FROM SLUMBER

*SHIE*, #144; *HaShira*, #160. **Heading:** “And he said, consoling himself, as he turned toward asceticism.” Scheindlin calls this a poem of “old age” and suggests that the poem presents a kind of spiritual autobiography—which happens to be remarkably similar to the one Browning presents in his “Rabbi Ibn Ezra” (though the

latter is assumed to be about Avraham Ibn Ezra). **Lines 1–2:** The eyes are identified with desire. The life of desire in this scheme is a kind of slumber; the life of the mind and contemplation is wakefulness. Numbers 15:39. **3–4:** Ecclesiastes 2:3; Isaiah 41:22. **5–6:** Job 11:6. **7–8:** Job 11:6; Psalms 82:6. **9–12:** Numbers 24:4, 16; Exodus 17:7; Job 23:9. **13–18:** Proverbs 2:27, 6:22, 4:18; Psalms 119:105. **19–20:** Proverbs 20:27. **21–22:** Psalms 39:6. **25–26:** Ecclesiastes 12:14; *Ta'amat* 11a. **27–28:** Obadiah 1:3. **29–30:** Deuteronomy 25:9, where a widow's removal of a brother-in-law's shoe and spitting in his face acknowledges his (the brother-in-law's) formal refusal to marry her and "build up his brother's house." **31–36:** 2 Samuel 1:10; Isaiah 3:18; Job 38:32; Ezekiel 13:11. **37–38:** Ezekiel 43:8. **39–42:** Isaiah 5:18, 55:5; Ezekiel 7:11. **43–44:** Literally, "I said: I kissed him in peace, and they said: I bit him with my teeth." I.e., because they do not really know me (my character), even my gestures of friendliness are interpreted as underhanded schemes. The Hebrew plays on kiss (*nashaq*) and bite (*nashakh*), like the midrash on Jacob and Esau. Micah 3:5. **47–48:** Psalms 55:15. **51–52:** 1 Kings 9:3; Psalms 63:6. **55–56:** Psalms 87:7, where the word *ma'ayanai*—literally, "springs"—is usually translated as "thoughts," "roots," or "sources."

#### LET MAN WAIL

*SHIE*, #128. **Lines 1–2:** Ezekiel 32:18; Psalms 31:11, 102:4; Exodus 19:18. **3–4:** Jeremiah 46:23.

#### ON THE DEATH OF HIS SON

From a series of eight poems he wrote after the death of his son Ya'aqov. **Heading:** "And he wrote short poems on the death of his small son." I. *SHIE*, #97. **Lines 1–4:** I.e., "my heart failed me," or "sank," as in Genesis 42:28.

II. *SHIE*, #237. **Line 4:** 2 Samuel 24:14, 1:26, 19:1.

III. *SHIE*, #211. **Line 2:** Job 41:6–7: "Who can open the door of his face? Round about his teeth is terror. His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal" [NJPS: "binding seal"]. **3–4:** Job 18:14; Lamentations 2:22.

#### THE BLIND

*SHIE*, #60. **Lines 1–2:** Genesis 27:1. **3–4:** *Megillah* 28a: "R. Nehunia b. HaQaneh was asked by his disciples: In virtue of what have you reached such a good old age? He replied: Never in my life have I sought respect through the degradation of my fellow." **5–6:** Jeremiah 22:28.

#### THE GAZELLE'S SIGH

*Moshe Ibn Ezra: Shirei Qodesh*, ed. S. Bernstein (Tel Aviv, 1958), #37 (hereafter *SQIE*); *HaShira*, #163:2. Even more than Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Ezra was known for his

often remarkable incorporation of strategies and images from secular Hebrew and Arabic poetry into his poetry for the synagogue. The history of this poem testifies to that success: throughout the modern period it has been considered an *ahava*, that is, a liturgical poem attached to the part of the liturgy that speaks of God's love for Israel. Fleischer, however, notes that it appears in many manuscripts of the poet's (secular) diwan, and that Brody omitted it from his edition of the secular poems because he thought its content rendered it liturgical; that said, it appears in no prayer books, bears no acrostic signature or any other liturgical markers, and is in fact a secular poem that involves the poet's allegorical Judaification of an Arabic motif. As such, it perfectly straddles the border between four traditions (Hebrew and Arabic on the one hand, and secular and sacred on the other). **Lines 1–2:** The poem employs the motif of the *atlaal*, or abandoned site of a beloved's camp or dwelling, over which the lover weeps. The image is central to the early qasida of the Arabic tradition. Here the abandoned dwelling would be the Land of Israel, though the word Ibn Ezra uses for it (*ma'on*) associates it with the Temple. Deuteronomy 26:15; Psalms 26:8; Jeremiah 10:22. For a talmudic parallel, see also *Makkot* 24b. **3–4:** Amos 3:4. **5–6:** The gazelle here is the congregation of Israel (feminine: *Knesset Yisrael*) and Edom, as always in the context of medieval Hebrew verse, stands for Rome and Christianity. **7–8:** "The bridegroom of her youth" is God. Jeremiah 3:4; Proverbs 2:17. **9–10:** Song of Songs 2:5.

## GOLD

*SQIE*, #38; *HaShira*, #163:3. Acrostic: *Moshe*. An *ahava*. Again the poem begins with a scene that might easily be part of a secular love poem and continues in this fashion until the last two lines, where the loyalty expressed is completely out of keeping with the conventions of the secular love lyric. As Scheindlin notes, the passive religious attitude of the lover in this poem—known in Arabic as *tawakkul*, or complete trust, even surrender—is usually associated with individual piety (see, for instance, Yehuda HaLevi's, "You Knew Me"); here it applies to the entire people of Israel. **Lines 1–2:** As in the previous poem, the beloved is God and the lover is the congregation of Israel. 1 Kings 14:15. **4–5:** Jeremiah 2:2: "I remember for thee the affection of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown"; Job 19:16; Psalms 119: 20, 40, 174. **6–7:** Job 13:15: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him"; Deuteronomy 31:18. **8–9:** Lamentations 4:1.

## THE DAY TO COME

*SQIE*, #76; *HaShira*, #164. Acrostic: *Moshe*. A *seliha*, in the form of a *muwashshah*. Ibn Ezra was known as *HaSalah* (the penitent, or composer of penitential poems—*selihot*), and his collected liturgical works contain a great many such poems for the period leading up to the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement.

**Lines 1–8:** The day of one’s death. Malachi 3:2. **16:** Psalms 146:4. **21:** Psalms 75:9. **32:** Deuteronomy 1:32. As in Ibn Gabirol’s *Kingdom’s Crown*, canto 27, the souls of the righteous ascend to the palace of wisdom and the throne of glory, where they dwell until the Day of Judgment.

#### AT THE HOUR OF CLOSING

*SQIE*, #150. (A shorter version of the *piyyut* can be found in *The Language of Faith*, ed. N. Glatzer [New York, 1967], p. 298.) Acrostic: *Moshe Hazaq*. Ibn Ezra’s most popular liturgical poem is found in many prayer books through the centuries, though Moshe Ibn Ezra was not always identified as its author. A *ne’ila*, the poem is recited as a prelude to the solemn conclusion near sunset of the Yom Kippur prayer service; it marks the annual “closing (*ne’ila*) of the gates” of heaven to prayers for repentance. The editor of Ibn Ezra’s liturgical poems also calls it a *pizmon*, as the opening lines were recited after each stanza as a refrain. **26:** To Jerusalem and Samaria. Ezekiel 23:4, 11, 22, 36, and 44. See also Yehuda HaLevi’s “Won’t You Ask, Zion?” lines 55–56.

#### YOSEF IBN TZADDIQ

##### A WEDDING NIGHT’S CONSOLATION

*Shirei Ibn Tzaddiq*, ed. Y. David (New York, 1982), #33. The poem is addressed to the recently wedded Avraham Ibn Ezra, who found himself in a most uncomfortable situation when his bride’s menstrual period began just after the wedding ceremony but before the marriage could be consummated. The biblically based Jewish laws of ritual purity forbid a husband from touching his wife for at least two weeks each month—seven days from the onset of bleeding and another seven days without any signs of blood. (Leviticus 15:19ff.: “And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be in her impurity seven days”; Leviticus 18:19: “Do not come near a woman during her period of uncleanness.”) The second seven days were added by the rabbinic tradition, after which point ritual immersion in the *mikve* would render the woman “clean.” (Later halakhic practices differed somewhat.) Ibn Tzaddiq, the *dayyan*, or religious judge, of Cordoba, teases his friend, who had no doubt been looking forward to his wedding night and now had to wait an additional two weeks to consummate the marriage. If the heading is understood as saying that Ibn Tzaddiq wrote on the seventh night after the wedding, then he might have been compounding the joke by writing just when a non-menstruating bride would, after the blood of the defloration, again be “clean” following her ritual immersion. (The two men were, however, not in the same city, and it would have taken at least a few days for the poem to reach Ibn Ezra, so he would not have received it

on the seventh night.) In other words, what would normally be a second night to look forward to has become for Ibn Ezra simply another night of frustration. Ibn Ezra responds with “The Wedding Night, Continued” (below). **Heading:** “And R. Yosef Ibn Tzaddiq wrote this to one of his friends, our teacher and master Avraham (of blessed memory), seven days after his wedding [or during the week after his wedding], as the bride’s menstrual period began before the deflowering, and he wrote in jest, saying.” **Line 2:** “Bridegroom of blood” alludes to the circumcision incident of Exodus 4:25, where, after the circumcision of her son, Ziporah says: “You are truly a bridegroom of blood to me.” The poem uses the scriptural citation to rub it in, as it were. **7:** Ezekiel 18:6: “neither hath [he] come near to a woman in her impurity.” *Shulhan Arukh*, the most important medieval code of Jewish law (sixteenth century—but based on earlier compilations), explains: “Any kind of approach is forbidden; he should not play with her or indulge in foolery, or even speak words that may lead to sin” (*Hilkhot Niddah* 153; *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*, trans. Judah Goldin [New York, 1961], 4:22). While stating that the menstrual period should be anticipated and weddings should be set while the bride is “clean,” the *Shulhan Arukh* also accounts for cases in which “it happens that [the bride] becomes menstrually unclean after the wedding ceremony and before cohabitation.” In these cases the bride and groom must be separated until she becomes clean. As we will see in Ibn Ezra’s reply, the Spanish-Hebrew poets were much less strict about such things. **9:** Deuteronomy 19:11. **11–12:** I.e., the sperm. **13–14:** There are two readings for this line. The alternative reading has: “for a drop is already outside you.” The rhetorical figure of contrasting elements suggests that the Hebrew should read *bitha* (safety i.e., if you stay outside, you’ll be safe) rather than *tipa* (a drop). **16:** Job 20:8. **19–20:** Numbers 13:19. **21–22:** Isaiah 63:1: “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with crimsoned garments from Bozrah?” Ibn Ezra plays on this scriptural image of the deliverance to be brought by a divine being in crimson garments. According to rabbinic interpretation of this biblical verse, the being is a vision of God as a bloody warrior returning from His battle with Israel’s enemy, whom He routed, bringing redemption to His people. **23:** Kahana’s text of Ibn Ezra’s reply, which also prints Ibn Tzaddiq’s poem, reads: “my soul laments” (as in Isaiah 19:8). See notes to Avraham Ibn Ezra’s “World Poetry.” **25–26:** The precise meaning of these lines is uncertain, and they may be referring to elements of a previous conversation the two writers had. One possible reading is that the reference here is to the unclean state of the couple, as in *Menahot* 109a: “The priests who ministered in the Temple of Onias may not minister in the Temple of Jerusalem; . . . for it is written, Nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat unleavened bread among their brethren. Thus they are like those that had a blemish . . . they are not permitted to offer sacrifices.” Kahana understands this to mean that Ibn Ezra is trapped in the worship of a woman (the high place, or altar)—though this isn’t clear. **29–30:** “Roused” here is also uncertain, and most likely refers to the arguments that Ibn Tzaddiq recalls

they would have over minor differences of opinion—the implication being that his friend knows Ibn Ezra’s passionate nature and can imagine how hard the frustration must be for him. Given the context, however, it may also allude to the use of the same word (*mitgarim*) in *Sanhedrin* 45a: “Lest . . . the young priests conceive a passion for her.” **31–32:** Psalms 68:36. **33–34:** Deuteronomy 28:43.

#### LADY OF GRACE

*Shirei Ibn Tzaddiq*, #17; *HaShira*, #245. Acrostic: *Yosef*. This most fluid of *muwashshahat* treats both Neoplatonic and popular beliefs concerning the linkage of soul and body. The Hebrew has an elaborate rhyme scheme, which adds a dense and perfectly symmetrical network of internal rhymes to the standard end-rhyme (*aa // bbb/aa // ccc/aa*, etc.) of the complex *muwashshah* stanza, yielding a full rhyme scheme that might be charted as follows: *abc/abc // def/def/def // agc/agc // hij/hij/hij // akc/akc*, etc. The translation echoes that movement through sound down the page, without trying to reproduce the rhyme scheme itself. The final two lines allude to the female voice of the secular *muwashshah*’s *kharja* (final couplet or quatrain in the English) and indicate the poem’s liturgical function as a prelude to the *nishmat* prayer. The poem is, liturgically, a *muharak* (a mover), that is, a strophic poem preceding the *reshut* to the prayer itself. **Line 1:** I.e., the soul. **4:** See Ibn Gabirol, *Kingdom’s Crown*, canto 29. **5:** The rest of the poem responds to the questions posed in line 4. **13:** Proverbs 1:4. **20:** Jeremiah 23:28. **29:** The soul emanates from a divine source and is, therefore, eternal.

#### SHELOMO IBN TZAQBEL

Ibn Tzaqbel was also known as Shelomo Ibn Sahl and was a relative of the poet Yosef Ibn Sahl. For detailed discussion of the Hebrew *maqama* and its conventions, see Schirrmann, *Toldot* (1995), pp. 91ff.; M. Huss, “HaMagid beMaqaama HaQlassit,” *Tarbiz* 65 (1996); and R. Drory, “The Maqama,” in Menocal et al., *The Literature of al-Andalus*, pp. 190–210). The poems in this section are spoken by the (noble) woman at various points in the *maqama*. First, while hiding behind a lattice she throws a perfumed apple inscribed with a poem down to the protagonist (Asher), who responds to this courtly gesture in apparently conventional but in fact presumptuous and somewhat vulgar fashion. The woman then seeks to teach him a lesson, gradually drawing him into both the palace and the ways of more refined courtly love. In the process, as she deceives and humiliates him through scenes of terror and “transvestite theater,” there develops a contrast between what Raymond Scheindlin calls “fawns of the palace and fawns of the field” (see *Prooftexts* 6/3 [1986]), representing, respectively, courtly and uncourtly behavior in love. Tova Rosen, in related but not identical fashion, reads the *maqama* and its lesson as a

commentary on the patriarchal order and a story of the protagonist’s “socialization, domestication, and sexual instruction” (*Unveiling Eve*, pp. 152–55).

## LINES INSCRIBED ON AN APPLE

*Yedi’ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha’Ivrit* 2 (Berlin, 1936), p. 156; *HaShira*, #246, lines 30–31. **Line 2:** Song of Songs 2:17.

## NOTE TO A SUITOR NOW PERPLEXED

*Yedi’ot HaMakhon* 2:159; *HaShira*, #246, lines 104–6. **Line 5:** Literally, “How could I forget [how you behaved previously]?” I.e., how can I forgive you for being so diffident earlier on and showing interest in others instead of me?

## A FAWN WITH HER LASHES

*Yedi’ot HaMakhon* 2:161; *HaShira*, #246, lines 158–59. **Line 2:** 1 Kings 1:52. **3:** Proverbs 3:27. **4:** Psalms 77:10. The fawn is grammatically masculine (perhaps for the meter) in the Hebrew, but clearly refers to the girl.

## YEHUDA HALEVI

My comments here are based in part on Ross Brann’s lucid examination of HaLevi’s life and work, and the complex ways in which the poet is viewed in the literature. See *The Literature of al-Andalus*, pp. 265–81, and *The Compunctious Poet*, pp. 88–89, where Brann writes among other things of the social context of HaLevi’s “war . . . waged against the cult of Arabic.” Other views of HaLevi, he notes, treat his “renunciation of ‘Greek wisdom’” and his “mystical rebirth.” The poet’s disillusionment with the situation of the Jewish courtiers is described in Schirmann, *Toldot* (1995), p. 437. On Jewish suffering at the hands of the Almoravids and the Christians, see note 47 to the introduction to this volume. Salo Baron’s assessment is in “Yehuda HaLevi: An Answer to an Historic Challenge,” *Jewish Social Studies*, July 1941, pp. 243–72. See also Yehuda Halevi, *Poems from the Diwan*, trans. Gabriel Levin (London, 2002), and the graceful introduction there. The chronology of HaLevi’s emergence as a poet on the one hand and his departure from Spain on the other rely for the most part on Schirmann’s version of these events in *Toldot* (1995), and in some cases on Ezra Fleischer’s research, much of which draws from the documents preserved in the Cairo Geniza. Other scholars, however, have proposed alternative chronologies: Yosef Yahalom, for example, argues that HaLevi was born in the city of Toledo, c. 1085 (not 1075), and never met Ibn Ezra in Granada. Ibn Ezra, according to Yahalom, was already on the move, and by the time HaLevi made contact with him, the older poet was in

Estrella, near the northeast coast of the peninsula. After the two met there, HaLevi continued on to Granada alone. With regard to HaLevi's pilgrimage, Fleischer uses evidence from the Geniza letters to suggest that he had in fact planned to leave Spain some ten years earlier and may have gotten as far as North Africa, but for reasons that remain elusive, he turned back. Fleischer also has a different chronology for at least some of the sea poems, as noted below, and he suggests that a preliminary version of *The Kuzari* had been composed by the summer of 1129 (Ezra Fleischer and Moshe Gil, *HaLevi uVenei Hugo* [HaLevi and His Circle] [Jerusalem, 2001], pp. 67, 184).

"Extreme racialism" is how Baron characterized HaLevi's thought, as it was reflected in *The Kuzari* (though later in the essay he calls it, simply, "racism"). Specifically, Baron is responding to the views put forth in that volume, where the rabbi-scholar characterizes the (chosen) Jews as "a people natively different from, and superior to, all other peoples." In a long and somewhat complex and shocking passage, the rabbi-scholar claims in *The Kuzari* that Jews (but not converts to Judaism) have a kind of supersoul, which endows them with the gift of prophecy and supremacy (see cf. 1:103; also 1:27, 47, 95, and 115). As M. S. Berger puts it: "The Rabbi thus posits a fifth level of soul, higher than the rational faculty: the divine disposition or essence, of which only the Jews partake. . . . [This] sets the Jews apart from the rest of humanity in their very essence" ("Toward a New Understanding of Judah HaLevi's *Kuzari*," *Journal of Religion*, 1992, pp. 210–28). Baron, however, warns that these "racialist contentions" need to be read not in modern terms, but in the context of both HaLevi's argument about the centrality of Jewish powerlessness and the highly race-conscious nature of the Andalusian world. With regard to HaLevi's "proto-Zionism," Schirmann comments that "there is nothing in the poet's worldview remotely reminiscent of modern political Zionism." Schirmann goes on to say that HaLevi's relation to the Holy Land was purely visionary, and that he set out for it knowing full well that the Crusaders were there and that he was likely to die carrying out his mission (*Toldot* [1995], p. 464). That said, a more recent and perhaps culturally updated assessment is offered by David Hartman: "In Israel today" religious nationalists regard HaLevi rather than Maimonides or other medieval Jewish thinkers as the spiritual precursor of religious Zionism" (*Israelis and the Jewish Tradition* [New Haven, 2000], p. 26). For more on all of the foregoing, see Y. Yahalom, "Diwan and Odyssey," *Miscellanea Estudios Arabica y Hebraica* 44 (1995): 23–45; Y. Yahalom, "Shira veHevra beMitzrayim," *Tzion* 45 (1980); Y. Yahalom, "Ginzei Leningrad veHeqer Shirat Hayyav shel R. Yehuda HaLevi," *Pe'amim* 46/47 (1991); Fleischer and Gil, *HaLevi uVenei Hugo*; Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 5, and "The Biography of R. Judah Ha-Levi in the Light of the Cairo Geniza Documents," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 28 (New York, 1959), pp. 41–56. The Sufi background of the *Kuzari* is treated by Diana Lobel (*Between Mysticism and Philosophy* [Albany, 2000]), who notes that, while HaLevi doesn't mention the Sufis by name, "he is clearly aware of the power of the Arabic terms he

chooses and uses them with ironic twists to draw in his Judaeo-Arabic readers. Like Maimonides in his *Eight Chapter on Ethics (Shemona Peraqim)*, HaLevi may be addressing Jews drawn to Sufi spirituality” (p. 159; see also pp. 4–5, 21, and 177).

All the poems in this selection were composed in the classical Andalusian styles, that is, as monorhymed or strophic poems employing quantitative meter.

#### THAT NIGHT A GAZELLE

*Diwan: Yehuda HaLevi*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1894–1930), 2:20 (hereafter *DYH*); *HaShira*, #175:4. **Line 3:** Song of Songs 4:1, 4. **4:** Her hair is *tzahov* (literally, “yellow”) in the Hebrew, which in the medieval literary context (see, for instance, Ibn Janaah) suggests a reddish tint of one sort or another. The color of the ideal beloved’s hair in the Arabic, and by extension Hebrew, tradition was of course black. But we know that blond or reddish hair was also prized. As HaLevi comes from the “Christian” north, it isn’t surprising to find him celebrating the fair-haired beauty as well. The Arabic author Ibn Hazm, HaNagid’s peer, expresses a similar preference: “In my youth I loved a slave-girl who happened to be a blonde; from that time I have never admired brunettes, not though their dark tresses set off a face as resplendent as the sun.” See A. J. Arberry, *The Dove’s Neck Ring* (London, 1953/94), pp. 61, 64. **9:** Job 7:4.

#### A DOE WASHES

*DYH*, 2:12; *HaShira*, #175:6. **Heading:** “He improvised this when he passed by a stream where laundry was being done. And this is among his most beautiful works.” (Or, “this is among the most beautiful things.”) **Lines 1–2:** Ofrah is both a woman’s first name and a word meaning “doe” or “fawn.” **3–4:** Jeremiah 8:2.

#### IF ONLY DAWN

*DYH*, 2:45. This poem has also at times been attributed to Levi Ibn Altabbaan (see Pagis, *Shirei Ibn Altabbaan*, p. 166). Elitzur has a fine analysis of this poem (*Shirat HaHol*, pp. 101–3), wherein she notes the gradual lifting of the lover’s gaze from line to line, from the wind to the clouds to the stars. At the same time, the presence or promise of the beloved grows closer and closer—from a caress mediated by the wind, to a softening of her heart, to the possibility of reaching her level, seeing her, and, perhaps, meeting on high. All of which only underscores the impossibility of their ever actually coming together. **Lines 3–4:** Psalms 72:3.

#### THAT DAY WHILE I HAD HIM

*DYH*, 2:16; *HaShira*, #180:2. Essentially a translation of a poem by the great tenth-century Arabic poet al-Mutanabbi, which reads: “A Syrian woman, when I was

alone with her,/saw her face in my eye;/and then she kissed my eye, and misled me,/for she was kissing there only her own mouth.” HaLevi freely adjusts the situation to suit his needs, in the process changing the gender of the self-infatuated lover from female to male—something neither convention nor meter would necessarily call for. While poems such as this one don’t necessarily confirm a poet’s homosexual experience, they do provide further evidence that the Andalusian Hebrew poets were not merely using the Arabic convention of the homoerotic poem to disguise affection for the opposite sex. **Line 1:** Isaiah 66:12. **3:** Genesis 27:12.

#### ANOTHER APPLE

*DYH*, 2:19. **Line 1:** Ezekiel 7:20. **4–8:** The poet’s slight of hand is deftly executed from here until the end of the poem. Nothing he has seen has matched her grace, though the apple he’s about to see (in his imagination) will be characterized in such terms as to recall precisely that grace. In other words, while no other woman is like her, she has the power to transform everything he sees into a reflection of her grace and beauty.

#### TO IBN AL-MU’ALLIM

“Asher Ahaz beKenafot Ahava,” ed. Y. Ratzhaby, *Itton* 77, no. 169 (1994). Now counted among the poet’s finest works, this remarkably lush poem of friendship was discovered in the Firkovitch Leningrad collection and first published by M. Stern in *Romanica et Occidentalia*, ed. M. Lazar (Jerusalem, 1963), and then with a detailed commentary by Ratzhaby. The poem is addressed to Shelomo Ibn al-Mu’allim, a Seville-born close friend of the poet who had written to him with a poem of his own, probably from Morocco, where he practiced medicine. (Maimonides says that Ibn al-Mu’allim was court physician to ‘Ali Ibn Yusef, the Almoravid ruler.) HaLevi was not in Granada to receive the letter and acknowledge the poem, and so his friend Moshe Ibn Ezra replied in his place; HaLevi then replied on his own when the letter finally reached him. The full qasida contains forty lines, which would be eighty in the translation. I have translated only an excerpt, from the erotic prelude (lines 1–2, 4–6 of the original) and lines 24–25. **Lines 1–2:** 2 Samuel 18:5: “Deal gently with the young man, for my sake.” **3–4:** The attraction is “pure,” i.e., Platonic; it isn’t supposed to lead to consummation. Proverbs 5:19. **5:** Or, “Let me gather. . . .” **6:** I.e., the red of your blushing cheeks and the white of the face. The Hebrew employs the term for a prohibited mixture, *kilayyim* (Leviticus 19:19: “Thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seeds”). **7–10:** That is, he would satisfy his desire (put out his fire) by taking in (seeing) the red glow of his cheeks, which also contain water that might put out the fire within his heart. The verb—translated here as “lift”—implies a withdrawal

or scooping of the coals from the fires of the Temple offerings (*Yoma* 4:4: “Every day he would scoop out the cinders with a silver pan and empty them into a golden one; but today he would clear out the coals in a gold one, and in that same one he would bring the [glowing] cinders in[to the inner sanctuary]”). Isaiah 30:14: “To take fire from the hearth.” **11:** Or: “I’d drain [suck] the lip.” **13:** Song of Songs 4:3. **15–18:** The translation skips five Hebrew (ten English) lines in which the poet describes in extremely sensual terms the scroll on which Ibn al-Mu‘allim’s poem is written: “The rows of myrrh are a gown of gold,/like twilight spread across the noon. . . ./Across the scroll his hands have fashioned/colors not found in the face of the fawn.” After that it skips twelve Hebrew lines (twenty four in English) in which HaLevi praises Ibn al-Mu‘allim in extravagant fashion (he likens him to the sun that will shine with sevenfold strength during the age of the Messiah); he then addresses him directly and tells him how much he misses him. The rest of the poem describes the suffering that his parting caused. He closes with a blessing. **17:** Ratzhaby’s manuscript has *hemah* (butter, as in Job 29:6); Stern has *homer* (clay), which makes more sense and which I have followed. In either case, the thrust is that the situation was comfortable for the poet, and he could do as he liked with Time, as the wheel of the sun turned like that of the potter.

#### IF ONLY I COULD GIVE

*DYH*, 1:89. A *muwashshah*. In “If Only I Could Be,” below, HaLevi employs the same form and similar motifs in a powerful liturgical poem. In this secular version, the images throughout are taken from the Arabic tradition. **Lines 1–4:** Job 29:2; Song of Songs 4:3. **8–10:** “Sun’s brother”—an epithet for the beloved. **13–14:** Literally, “Love’s hand joined me to him, and never led me astray.” **15–16:** Genesis 16:5. **21:** The fine thread of cruel fate. **34:** Psalms 18:17. **35:** The poet now turns to tell of his new friend, David [Abu al-Hasan ben al-Dayyan], who made him forget his sorrow over separation from the “fawn.” He dedicates this poem to him. **40:** Judges 29:9. **40:** Judges 9:29. **41–42:** Deuteronomy 32:42. **45–50:** The poet now lays the ground for the *kharja* of the poem. **51–54:** HaLevi here follows common practice with the secular *muwashshah* and places the lines of the *kharja* in the mouth of a female figure, who speaks in the local dialect—in this case a mixture of Arabic and Romance (written out in Hebrew letters). Usually this is a woman of a lower class; here it is a dove who sings like a young woman, and her song seems to be telling the protagonist that, with his new friend, he will overcome the obstacles Fate puts before him. According to Yosef Yahalom and Isaac Benabu (“The Importance of the Genizah Manuscripts for the Establishment of the Text of the Hispano-Romance Kharjas In Hebrew Characters,” *Romance Philology* 40/2 (1986): 139–58), these lines should read: “venceray beni /el querer estaba beni // dexta al-zameni/con fillo [d’] Ibn al-Dayyeni.”

## EPITHALAMIUM

*D.Y.H.*, 2:29. A wedding poem, a genre that combines elements of the encomium and the poem of desire, or love poem. It often incorporates elements of the poems of description as well (particularly descriptions of the garden). Other wedding poems are closer in spirit and form to liturgical poetry, and still others were intended to be recited as part of the liturgy. See, in this volume, Dunash's "Blessing for a Wedding." **Lines 1–2:** Genesis 14:3; Isaiah 24:21. **4:** Job 41:8: "One is so near another that not even a breath can enter between them. They are joined to one another [and] cannot be parted." A lovely image, of course, though in Job it refers to the scales on a dangerous mythological creature, modeled on the crocodile. **6:** The translation here is free. The lines read, literally, "and found a sun [the bride] among its daughters." **7:** Literally, "he set up a canopy of leafy boughs." The masculine subject here refers to the groom, though as the image of the final lines unfolds, readers who have the Psalms in mind will most likely also understand it as referring to—or at least suggesting—God. This ambiguity, however, is not central to the poem, which concentrates on the happy couple. "Leafy boughs" literally translates an obscure phrase from Leviticus 23:4; in the context of the poem, the various commentators note, it means "myrtle branches," as the wedding canopies were often decorated with branches from fragrant plants. The "myrtle canopy" is mentioned in *Ketubot* 17b. Myrtle and its fragrance are traditionally associated in this poetry (as in classical Western verse) with beauty and love; in the Hebrew context there is also a remote messianic dimension to the association, deriving from Zechariah 1:8–11. See Ibn Gabirol's "The Garden" and the notes to that poem. **8:** The image of the tent for the sun derives from Psalms 19:5: "He placed in them [in the heavens] a tent for the sun, who is like a groom coming forth from his chamber." Sun (*shemesh*) can be either masculine or feminine, grammatically. In the psalm it is masculine; in the poem it is analogous to the bride. The tent is like the heavens, in which the sun shines (and has dominion). In the modern context, the canopy will inevitably also be understood as shelter, and the translation preserves that possibility.

## WHEN A LONE SILVER HAIR

*DYH*, 2:316; *HaShira*, #178:2. **Line 4:** 1 Samuel 30:8: "And David inquired of the Lord, saying: 'Shall I pursue after this troop?'"

## IF TIME

*DYH*, 2:301. This poem also appears in Falaqera's *Book of the Seeker*.

## INSCRIPTIONS ON BOWLS

Two of several such inscriptions that are attributed to both HaLevi and Moshe Ibn Ezra. The practice of decorating bowls with lines of verse was taken over from the Arabic tradition. In both cases, the bowl itself is speaking.

## I.

*DYH*, 2:312; *SHIE*, #48. The bowl speaks to the guest before it. The Hebrew mentions only a piece of “fine fat,” implying a juicy piece of meat; the connotations of fat were entirely positive in the medieval context and implied bounty. **Heading:** “Among what he inscribed on gilded bowls.”

## II.

*DYH*, 2:215; *SHIE*, #165. **Heading:** As above. The bowl speaks to its host and, by implication, the guests who admire it. **Line 4:** Lamentations 2:19.

## FOUR RIDDLES

HaLevi had a distinct fondness for the riddle, and his diwan contains some forty-nine of them. Like all the medieval Hebrew (and Arabic) riddles, these rely on an often deliberately misleading presentation of apparent paradoxes and oppositions, the solution of which usually lies in unraveling the metaphorical code of the poem. Essentially descriptive epigrams, the best of them lose little from the revelation of their answers.

## I.

*DYH* 2:195. The translation is somewhat free. Answer: A hand mirror.

## II.

*DYH* 2:205; *HaShira*, #179:1. Answer: A pen.

## III.

*DYH* 2:200. Answer: Seed.

## IV.

*DYH* 2:209. Answer: A cloud. **Lines 3–4:** The Hebrew verb is *soheqet*, which might be variously translated as laughing, playing, teasing, being happy.

## DEPARTURE

*DYH*, 1:159. This is essentially HaLevi’s translation, or adaptation, of an Arabic poem, whose author isn’t mentioned. **Line 3:** Genesis 33:14, with reference to Jacob and Esau. **6:** Jeremiah 14:18.

## ON FRIENDSHIP AND TIME

*DYH*, 1:154; *HaShira*, #185:1. This qasida was written to the poet's older friend and former mentor, Moshe Ibn Ezra, who was at the time living in "exile" in northern—Christian—Spain while HaLevi was still in the south. (For details on Ibn Ezra's departure from Andalusia, see the biographical introduction to his poems in this anthology.) It is one of the more moving poems of friendship in the entire canon. The long prelude treating separation (in this case philosophically) is followed by a transition (lines 25–28) to the poet's direct address to his friend and fond recollection of their friendship (lines 29–44). That in turn is followed by HaLevi's uncharacteristic complaint (lines 45–64)—reminiscent of Ibn Gabirol's "On Leaving Saragossa"—about the company he is now forced to keep. Finally the poet returns to the philosophical theme with which the poem began. **Lines 1–2:** Judges 5:21. **8–9:** Psalms 8:4. **9–10:** Psalms 77:11. **13–16:** Genesis 25:23, 11:1–9—the story of Jacob and Esau on the one hand, and the Tower of Babel on the other. **18:** Proverbs 3:8. **19–20:** Isaiah 8:21; Numbers 23:7–8. **21–22:** Job 21:13. **24:** Job 30:4. **27:** Exodus 40:35. **28:** Jeremiah 13:17. **31:** Genesis 44:30. **37–38:** Song of Songs 5:13; Isaiah 66:11. **39–40:** Song of Songs 2:17. **42:** Isaiah 9:4. **45:** HaLevi turns to his present state, surrounded by people who neither understand him nor have much patience with him. **46–48:** Jeremiah 9:7; Psalms 55:22. **50:** Isaiah 5:21. **59–60:** Genesis 37:7, and Joseph's dream of the sheaves. **62:** Proverbs 11:22. **66:** I.e., Time, or Fortune and Fate, are merely vessels, which will be shed when the soul passes on to the world to come. Daniel 3:27.

## SLAVES OF TIME

*DYH*, 2:300; *HaShira*, #227. **Line 1:** *Qiddushin* 22b: "Why was the ear singled out from all the other parts of the body? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, This ear—which heard my Voice on Mount Sinai when I proclaimed, *For unto me the children of Israel are servants, they are my servants* (Leviticus 25:55), and not servants of servants, and yet this [man] went and acquired a master for himself—let it be bored." Also *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. from the Arabic by Hartwig Hirschfeld, introduction H. Slonimsky (New York, 1964), 5:25: "I only seek freedom from the service of those numerous people whose favor I do not care for, and shall never obtain, though I worked for it all my life. Even if I could obtain it, it would not profit me—I mean serving men and courting their favor. I would rather seek the service of the One whose favor is obtained with the smallest effort, yet it profits in this world and the next. This is the favor of God, his service spells freedom, and humility before Him is true honor." **4:** Lamentations 3:24: "'The Lord is my portion,' saith my soul."

## HEAL ME, LORD

*DYH*, 2:294; *HaShira*, #233. **Heading:** "And he wrote this when he drank a potion." HaLevi, we recall, was a physician, and the "I" of this poem is clearly

personal. All knowledge, even medical knowledge, is nothing without divine guidance. See *The Kuzari* 1:79, which states that the “conditions which render man fit to receive [the] divine influence do not lie within him.” HaLevi then proceeds by way of analogy to compare the man who has prepared himself properly to receive the divine influence to a well-trained physician who is trained in the preparation of appropriate medicines and is able to explain to patients how they are to be administered. **Line 1:** Numbers 12:13. **5–6:** Job 10:7.

## TRUE LIFE

*DYH*, 2:296; *HaShira*, #221. The transparency of this poem is representative of the transparency at the heart of HaLevi’s mystical vision, a vision which involves the aspirant’s surrender to the divine and his passive reception of God’s presence. That said, this is apparently not a liturgical poem at all, and Brody classifies it with the secular poetry. The image of God appearing in a dream recalls the night-visitation of the lover in Arabic secular love poetry (see, for instance, Yosef Ibn Hasdai’s “The Qasida,” above) and adds a measure of passion and vulnerability to the poem. The final image of the poem recalls Raabi’a, the mystical Arabic woman poet who was known to shut the windows in spring, since, as Rumi put it in his version of her story, “the gardens and the fruits are inside, in the heart” (Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Culture*, p. 39, and Scheindlin, *The Gazelle*, p. 200). HaLevi comments in *The Kuzari*, 4:3: “But our intellect . . . cannot penetrate to the true knowledge of things, except by the grace of God, by special faculties which He has placed in the senses. . . . To the chosen among His creatures He has given an inner eye which sees things as they really are, without any alteration. . . . [The] prophets without doubt saw the divine world with the inner eye. . . . His sight reaches up to the heavenly host direct, he sees the dwellers in heaven, and the spiritual beings which are near God, and others in human form.” **Lines 1–2:** Psalms 36:10. **3:** Exodus 33:22–23. **4:** “In a dream,” i.e., with that “inner eye.” **7–8:** Exodus 28:26.

## THE MORNING STARS

*Shirei Qodesh leRabbi Yehuda haLevi*, ed. D. Yarden (Jerusalem, 1978/86), #288. (hereafter *SQYH*); *HaShira*, #234. *A reshut*. Three levels of the cosmos praise God by mirroring His splendor in their own way: the stars, the angels, and the people of Israel, though the universalizing vision of Neoplatonic linkage (which we find, for instance, with Ibn Gabirol) gives way here to HaLevi’s particularist vision, wherein the congregation gathered in the synagogue at dawn represents the elect human contingent in this chorus of praise. This medieval cosmic scheme is nonetheless very loosely based on Psalms 103:20, which exhort His angels, His heavenly hosts, and “His works in all places of His dominion” to bless the Lord. The three “dominions,” “worlds,” or “forces” are also mentioned in

Avraham Ibn Ezra's commentary to these psalmic verses and to Daniel 10:21, as well as in the mystical Hebrew work *Sefer HaBahir*. **Lines 1–4:** As above, so below, down through the levels of creation. Job 38:7: "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." **6:** Psalms 57:9.

#### HIS THRESHOLDS

*SQYH*, #95; *HaShira*, #219. A *reshut* to the *nishmat*. Acrostic: *Yehuda*. Again, the notion of *tawakkul* is at the heart of HaLevi's religious experience. **Lines 1–2:** Psalms 22:21; Jeremiah 2:36; Isaiah 5:11, 21:4; Job 24:15. **9:** Scheindlin notes that the imperative here applies both literally (come to the synagogue) and figuratively (think of God always and trust in His way; but—and especially—just *be*, i.e., "imitate His unmoved serenity").

#### WHERE WILL I FIND YOU

*SQYH*, #97, lines 1–2, 13–14; *HaShira*, #231. This poem is part of a longer *ofan* for the festival of Simhat Torah. To the best of my knowledge, it was first published as an independent lyric fragment in *Language of Faith*, ed. Nahum Glatzer (New York, 1974). While the full poem is also of interest, these verses seem to epitomize HaLevi's lyric faith and poetics, and so I present them in their fragmented form; they are among his most famous—and powerful—lines. **Lines 1–5:** Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6:18: "But will God in very truth dwell with me on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have builded." Isaiah 6:3; Ezekiel 3:12; *Hagigah* 13b: "'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place'; accordingly, no one knows His place." **8–9:** Exodus 19:17: "And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God." Rashi comments on this verse: "This tells us that the Shekhina was going forth to meet them, as a bridegroom who goes forth to meet his bride"; also Rashi to Deuteronomy 33:2: "He (God) was Himself going forth facing them." See Septimus, *Divrei Hazal*, p. 611.

#### YOU KNEW ME

*SQYH*, #68; *HaShira*, #229. A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Yehuda*. Reading this poem alongside Ibn Gabirol's "Before My Being," which takes up an almost identical poetic tack, highlights the essential difference between the two poets. Scheindlin: "[HaLevi's] religious stance is not the complex, bitter piety of [Ibn Gabirol's "Before My Being,"] but the accepting, tranquil mood of *tawakkul*" (*Gazelle*, p. 216). **Lines 1–2:** Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations!" **5–6:** *The Kuzari*, 5:20. **8:** Psalms 5:13. **9–10:** The line refers both to any synagogue and the shrine in Jerusalem. As in "Where Will

I Find You” and other poems, HaLevi blends private and public religious concerns more thoroughly than any other poet of the period.

#### A DOE FAR FROM HOME

*SQYH*, #330; *HaShira*, #190. An *ahava*. **Lines 1–4:** Again, the doe is Israel and the beloved is God. Edom is Christendom and Hagar is Islam. Proverbs 5:19; Genesis 18:13; Job 30:1; Lamentations 4:21; Genesis 34:8; Deuteronomy 10:15. **5–8:** Genesis 16:11–12; Song of Songs 8:5; *Megillah* 29a: “Come and see how beloved are Israel in the sight of God, in that to every place to which they were exiled, the Shekhina went with them.” **9–10:** Song of Songs 8:7; Psalms 78:21.

#### A DOVE IN THE DISTANCE

*SQYH*, #357; *HaShira*, #196. One of HaLevi’s finest poems. Its genre isn’t known; Schirmann tentatively classifies it as a *seliha*. Acrostic: *Yehuda Levi*. The dove in the Hebrew liturgical tradition is—by virtue of its tenderness and poignant cooing (which imply suffering)—associated with the beloved in the Song of Songs (2:14, 5:2, 6:9, and more), and by extension with the congregation of Israel. (See Hosea 11:11 and Isaiah 39:14, 60:8.) In the Andalusian context it also carries overtones of the spring garden and all that implies. The rhythm of the opening in Hebrew and English alike mimics the fluttering and flight of the dove. **Line 1:** Psalms 56:1: “Upon the silenced dove, of those that are far away” (*The Hirsch Psalms* [Jerusalem and New York, 1997]). In the Targum, the community of Israel far from its cities is likened to a silent dove. Also Psalms 55:7–8. **7:** It was thought that the redemption would come one thousand years after the destruction of the Temple, i.e., 1068 (calculated in the Jewish calendar from 68 C.E. rather than 70). **12:** Isaiah 53:12. **14:** Jeremiah 20:9: “And if I say: ‘I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name,’ then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones.” **24:** Job 14:21. **27:** Psalms 50:3.

#### YOU SLEPT, THEN TREMBLING ROSE

*DYH*, 2: 302; *HaShira*, #202. This apocalyptic poem is included in the secular *diwan*, though its substance and field of reference are religious. It involves a dream-vision, most likely a reflection of the poet’s deep-seated personal desire for collective deliverance and redemption, and the poem confirms the messianic background to his eventual pilgrimage. (The poet sees the fall of the Kingdom of Ishmael, which was predicted for 1130.) While HaLevi didn’t embark on his voyage across the Mediterranean for another eleven years, recent scholarship (see above) indicates he did in fact attempt to leave Spain just before 1130, but his plans were dashed for reasons that remain obscure. **Line 2:** Genesis 37:10; the line is a verbatim quotation of Jacob’s response to Joseph’s having told him of his

dream about the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowing down to him. It also echoes Daniel 2:3 and Nebuchadnezzar's question about his own dream, which Daniel eventually interprets, very much along the revolutionary lines and language of the vision in this poem. **7:** The Hebrew has "your mistress's child," i.e., Sarah's son (the people of Israel). Genesis 15:8, 17:2ff. **9:** Literally, "and the year 4890 [according to the Jewish calendar; 1129/30 C.E.] will come." Years, like numbers, in Hebrew are written out with letters standing for the numerals, so that the year 4890 is the same as the word meaning "to crush" or "pull down," as in Jeremiah 1:10: "See, I have set this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to overthrow." It appears elsewhere in Jewish medieval literature as well, prior to HaLevi (*Pirquei Heikhalot Rabbati* 40:1). **11:** Genesis 16:12. **13–18:** The remainder of the poem is largely in Aramaic, intensifying the allusion to and identification with the Book of Daniel's apocalyptic visions. The implicit equivalence is between Ishmael and the figures seen in Daniel's vision. Daniel 7:8, 21, 2:33, 34: "a stone which . . . smote the image upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces"; Job 41:3.

#### LOVE'S DWELLING

SQYH, #332; *HaShira*, #192. Again a fascinating blend of Arabic/Hebrew, Muslim/Jewish, and religious/secular concerns, compounded by the confusion of apparent tranquility and inner agony embodied in the poem. Previous commentators have noted the strangely foreign (non-Jewish) nature of the poem's sentiments, and this extreme expression of Israel's love for God was in fact revealed by scholar Israel Levin to be a translation (except for the final two lines) of an eighth/ninth-century secular Arabic poem by Abu-l-Shis, a contemporary of Abu Nuwas. Scheindlin points out that the Arabic poem was anthologized by the Andalusian Sufi and contemporary of HaLevi, Ibn al-'Arif, who interpreted it along religious lines. Scheindlin has an extensive discussion of all of the above elements of the poem (*Gazelle*, pp. 79–83). He compares it to Ibn Ghiyyat's "My Wandering" (above) and observes that Ibn Ghiyyat's poem expresses the fairly common pride of the martyr, while HaLevi's expresses the more radical, transformative pride of the mystic. See also *The Kuzari*, 1:115: "If we bear our exile and degradation for God's sake, as is meet, we shall be the pride of the generation which will come with the Messiah, and accelerate the day of the deliverance we hope for." **Line 1:** Proverbs 8:22. **2:** Ruth 1:16. **3:** For a sense of the secular Arabic tradition behind this poem, see Ibn Hazm's *The Ring of the Dove*, trans. A. J. Arberry, p. 96. **4:** 1 Samuel 2:30. **6:** Psalms 69:27. **10:** Deuteronomy 9:26; Psalms 111:9.

#### LORD,

SQYH, #32; *HaShira* #228. A *baqasha* for Yom Kippur. **Line 1:** Psalms 38:10. **2:** Ezekiel 36:3. **3–4:** Psalms 30:6; Job 6:8. **5:** Psalms 31:6; Malachi 2:15. *The Kuzari*,

1:108. **6:** Jeremiah 31:25. **7–8:** Deuteronomy 11:22. *Berakhot* 18a–b, where wicked men are called dead while alive, and the righteous are called alive when they die. **9–10:** Exodus 10:26. **11:** Psalms 25:4. **12:** Literally, “prison of folly.” Psalms 126:4. **15–18:** Job 7:20; Isaiah 1:14; Psalms 31:11. **21:** Genesis 23:4. **23–24:** Genesis 30:30. **25:** Ecclesiastes 3:11. **29–30:** Job 17:14. **31–32:** Ecclesiastes 7:14; Judges 19:9. **40:** *Avot* 1:14. **41–42:** Micah 1:8; Isaiah 61:10.

#### IF ONLY I COULD BE

SQYH, #28; *HaShira*, #225. A *muharak*, in the form of a *muwashshah*. Acrostic: *Yehuda*. It is interesting to compare this poem with HaLevi’s “If Only I Could Give,” (above), which treats a similar situation in wholly secular fashion. **Lines 1–2:** Job 29:2, 31:15. **5–6:** Isaiah 49:5; Psalms 23:1, 139:13. **7–10:** Psalms 139:2–3, 23–24. **21–22:** Psalms 25:5. **24:** Job 10:2. **26:** Psalms 40:9. **29:** Numbers 12:13, where Moses asks that Miriam’s leprosy be healed. **31–34:** Deuteronomy 29:27; 1 Kings 8:57; Psalms 71:9. **35–36:** Ezekiel 26:16. **37–40:** Micah 1:8; Jeremiah 51:18; Isaiah 53:5. **45–48:** Numbers 4:47; Proverbs 2:5. **51–54:** Isaiah 64:11, 11:11, 58:9.

#### WON’T YOU ASK, ZION

SQYH, #401; *DYH*, 2:155–58; *HaShira*, #208:1. A *qina*. Though the poem is classified as part of the poet’s secular diwan, it has been incorporated into the Ashkenazic liturgy for the Ninth of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the Temples. It is now one of HaLevi’s most well-known works. Gabriel Levin speaks of its “iconic” status: “Translated into numerous languages, it was appropriated by German Romantics, Haskalah reformists and Jewish nationalists who saw in its fervor and unrestrained longing for a homeland an echo of their own strivings for religious-national identity. After reading Johann Gottfried von Herder’s translation, published in 1791, Goethe would write with admiration of the poem’s rare ‘fire of longing’” (*Poems from the Diwan*, p. 162). Fleischer and Gil suggest that the poem was most likely written in Egypt (*HaLevi uVenei Hugo*, p. 235). **Lines 1–2:** Those who are held like prisoners in Exile, “captive” to their longing. **6:** Isaiah 57:19. **8:** Zechariah 9:12: “Return to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.” **11:** Psalms 133:3. **12:** Micah 1:8. **14:** Genesis 31:27. **16:** Genesis 32:3, 31. Peni’el, meaning “God’s face,” because Jacob wrestled with the angel and encountered the Lord there. Mahana’im refers to “God’s camp,” where Jacob was met by angels. **18:** The Shekhina, which figures prominently in *The Kuzari*, 2:14, 23. **19:** *The Kuzari*, 2:14 and 4:10. **20–21:** Isaiah 60:19. **26:** Jeremiah 3:17; Genesis 27:37, where Isaac refers to Esau and his descendants (i.e., Christianity) as Jacob’s servants. **29–30:** Psalms 55:7–8; Song of Songs 2:17. **33–34:** The cave of Machpelah in Hebron, where according to tradition all the patriarchs and matriarchs except for Rachel are buried. Genesis 23:6, 19, 49:29–32, and 50:13. **35–36:** Isaiah 10:18. **37–38:** Mount Abarim is in Moab, but according to HaLevi also part of the Land

of Israel. Mount Hor is the mountain where Aaron died. Numbers 20:25; Deuteronomy 32:48–50. The two great lights are Moses and Aaron. **39–40:** Exodus 30:23; *The Kuzari*, 4:17; Psalms 102:15. **41–42:** Isaiah 20:3. **44:** *Yoma* 52b: “In the days of Jeremiah the prophet the ark had already vanished.” **45–46:** Jeremiah 7:29. **49–51:** Jeremiah 15:3; Ecclesiastes 11:7. The Hebrew plays on the word *‘oravim* (ravens/crows), which is spelled the same as *‘aravim* (Arabs), though the words are vocalized differently. **55–56:** Ezekiel 23:4: “Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah.” They committed “harlotries.” **57:** Lamentations 2:15. **67–68:** 1 Samuel 15:27; Song of Songs 7:9. **69–70:** Babylonia and Egypt. Literally, “Could their vanity [i.e., their sorcerers and the like] resemble your Urim and Tumim?” (Exodus 28:30 and 1 Samuel 28:6). Fleischer sees the mere raising of this comparison as an indication that the poem was written in Egypt, as part of an argument the poet was having with the local Jews, who tried to persuade him not to make the dangerous trip to the Holy Land, and to rest content with the “holy” sites of Egypt. A question of this sort, he says, would never have been raised in Andalusia (*HaLevi uVenei Hugo*, pp. 234–35). **74:** Proverbs 27:24; Isaiah 2:18. **76:** Psalms 65:5; Daniel 12:12. **82:** Ezekiel 16:55.

#### MY HEART IS IN THE EAST

*SQYH*, #402; *DYH*, 2:155; *HaShira*, #208:2. This is one of the most famous poems in all of Hebrew literature, and its theme and lyric concision have spoken to Jews throughout the Diaspora for centuries. On the whole, it is a song of antitheses, contrasting West and East, ease and hardship, waste and worth, and material and spiritual planes of existence. Its nationalist emphases apart, the poem also brings to mind the early Arabic poem by the first Spanish emir, the Damascene refugee Abd al-Rahmaan I (d. 788), who longed for his home in the East (see Cole, *Selected HaNagid*, p. xxvi). **Lines 1–2:** The Atlantic Ocean—or the Sea of Darkness—was considered the outer limits of the known world. **5–8:** Numbers 30:5–6. The poet is referring to his vow to abandon Spain and all it stands for and head for Jerusalem, then in Crusader hands. (The Crusaders, who conquered the city in 1099, forbade Jews to reside within its precincts.) “Arabia’s chains” refers to Muslim rule in Spain and the entire Islamic ethos that went with it, but it also alludes to the Arabic meters, which HaLevi elsewhere refers to as “shackles.” **12:** Psalms 28:2.

#### HOW LONG WILL YOU LIE

*SQYH*, #10; *HaShira*, #218. *Reshut* to the *nishmat*. Acrostic: *Yehuda*. **Line 1–2:** Proverbs 6:9–10: “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard”; *Hagigah* 16a; Ecclesiastes 11:10. **4:** Proverbs 13:24. **5–6:** Isaiah 52:2; Song of Songs 5:2. **7:** Psalms 84:4. The word *dror* in the Hebrew means both “swallow” and freedom. **8–9:** Psalms 89:8; Jeremiah 31:11–12: “They shall come and shout on the heights of Zion, radiant over the bounty of the Lord.”

## HEART AT SEA

SQYH, #407; DYH, 2:160; HaShira #212:1. From here on the poems in this section are all technically “nonliturgical poems”—that is, they are included in HaLevi’s secular diwan, despite their explicitly religious content. Psalms 107:23 provides the literary background for this poem, which is essentially an imaginary voyage to the Holy Land. Like “My Heart Is in the East,” “How Long Will You Lie,” “Won’t You Ask, Zion,” and other poems, it may have been composed along the arc of HaLevi’s self-preparation for his eventual abandonment of Spain and journey to the Land of Israel. For analysis of this poem see Andras Hamori, “Lights in the Heart of the Sea: Some Images of Judah Halevi’s,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 30/1 (1985): 75–83. **Lines 3–4:** *The Kuzari*, 5:25. **6:** Literally, “and run after every desire.” **7–8:** Judges 18:9; Genesis 25:29–34 and Esau’s sale of his birthright to Jacob for a pot of lentils—i.e., reward in this world as opposed to the world to come. **9–10:** Proverbs 30:15–16; Ezekiel 47:12. **15–16:** Psalms 12:2; Numbers 24:1. Literally, “with a double heart.” **17:** *Avot* 5:23: “Be bold as a leopard and light as an eagle and swift as a gazelle and strong as a lion to do the will of the father which is in Heaven.” **19–20:** I.e., though the storms be such that they cause mountains to fall into the sea, or create waves that look like mountains, then crumble. Psalms 46:3: “though mountains be moved into the heart of the seas.” **21–22:** Literally, “hands are like rags” and “cunning soothsayers,” as in Isaiah 3:3. The word (*harashim*) can also be read as “workers” (Jeremiah 10:3, 1 Chronicles 4:14); Jeremiah 38:12. **25:** Isaiah 33:23. **30:** Leviticus 26:5. **35–36:** Genesis 6:14ff. **43–44:** Job 17:1. **52:** The poet turns to address himself. **54:** Exodus 14:21; Joshua 4:22–23. **58:** *Avot* 2:2. **63–64:** Psalms 89:10; “Thou rulest the proud swelling of the sea; when the waves thereof rise, Thou stillest them.” 107:29–30; 1 Samuel 30:16. **71:** Genesis 1:26. **75:** *Sotah* 17a: “And the sea resembles heaven.” **76:** Ezekiel 27:24ff. **78:** Psalms 89:10.

## MY SOUL LONGED

SQYH, #409; HaShira, #213. **Heading:** “On his emigration and his longing toward Jerusalem.” **Line 1:** I.e., the sanctuary and the Temple shrine (as in the Jerusalem Talmud, Nazir 80:8). Psalms 84:3. **2:** Because of the difficult nature of the voyage. Exodus 15:15. **3:** 2 Samuel 14:20; Jeremiah 32: 18–19.

## HAS A FLOOD WASHED THE WORLD

SQYH, #417; DYH, 2: 169; HaShira, #214:8. The voyage on the small wooden vessels of the day would have taken an uncomfortable six weeks—a considerable risk for a man of HaLevi’s age (he was at least sixty-five). In one of his other sea poems HaLevi makes it clear that, “buried alive in a wooden coffin [of the ship], . . ./he could sit—but not stand up on his feet,/lie down—but not stretch out.” Gabriel Levin comments: “[The boats] were no more than seagoing barges, shaped like oversized nutshells and propelled by oars and stiff, square-rigged sails.

Passengers, who were expected to bring their own provisions, slept on deck, pressed against bales of merchandise” (*Poems from the Diwan*, p. 23). Levin also notes the dangers of starvation, illness, and piracy. Jews were separated from the other passengers. HaLevi’s sea poems are, after HaNagid’s (possibly fantastical) poem about his encounter with the sea monster, the only poems from the Spanish-Hebrew period that deal with the sea or sea travel. There is, it hardly needs to be said, given the conditions sketched above, nothing romantic about them. **Lines 1–2:** Genesis 6:17, 8:13; Ezekiel 30:12; Proverbs 17:1. **3–4:** Jeremiah 33:10; Genesis 7:21; Jeremiah 12:4; Psalms 73:19; Isaiah 50:11. **5–6:** Literally, “seeing a mountain or pit.” Jeremiah 2:6. **9–10:** Job 40:25. **11–12:** Literally, “as though it (the craft) had been stolen by the hand of the sea.” Schirmann notes that the image here is based on the vocabulary of pledge and trust, as in Leviticus 5:21: “When a person sins . . . by dealing deceitfully with his fellow in the matter of a deposit or pledge . . .” The implication is that the craft is given to the sea as a pledge and should be returned (to land or safety) at the end of the voyage, but the sea seems to be reneging on that agreement and trying to swallow it up, or hide it in the swells. Hosea 9:2; Joshua 7:11. **13–14:** Jonah 1:15; Psalms 28:7; Leviticus 21:12.

#### IN THE HEART

SQYH, #416; DYH, 2: 174; HaShira, #214:7. **Heading:** “And he said during a storm at sea.” **Lines 1–2:** Psalms 93:3. **3–4:** Psalms 95:5; Daniel 6:27. **5–6:** Jeremiah 5:22.

#### ABOVE THE ABYSS

SQYH, #415; DYH, 2: 174; HaShira, #214:6. **Heading:** “And he said at sea during a storm.” **Lines 1–2:** Nahum 2:11. **3–4:** Psalms 107:27. **7–8:** Psalms 107:27, 116:19.

#### TIME HAS TOSSED ME

SQYH, #420; DYH, 2: 182; HaShira, #216. Written while in Egypt, where he spent the winter, awaiting the second leg of his voyage. HaLevi’s ship arrived two weeks late, reaching the port of Alexandria on September 9, 1140. **Heading:** “And he said concerning the Egyptian desert.” **Lines 1–2:** Literally, “the desert of Noph,” which is Memphis, south of Cairo. Isaiah 22:18: “He will violently roll and toss thee like a ball into a large country; there shalt thou die, there shall be the chariots of thy glory.” Also Isaiah 19:13. **3–4:** An epithet for Jerusalem, as in Psalms 48:3: “Fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth; even Mount Zion, the uttermost parts of the north, the city of the great King.” **5–6:** Based on the new JPS translation of Isaiah 22:18, and Gabriel Levin’s note and translation in his *Poems from the Diwan*—and in keeping with the rhythmic emphases of the Hebrew—I have translated *etznof* as “whirl,” though it can also be taken to mean “wrap” or “wind” [His glory or turban about me] or “exult and dance.” The

Hebrew is likewise ambiguous. Psalms 48:3; Isaiah 59:17; Psalms 71:13; Leviticus 16:4; Isaiah 22:18 (NJPS): “He will wind you about Him as a headdress, a turban.” The turban, or miter, was a sign of spiritual merit and exaltation.

## BE WITH ME

*SQYH*, #419; *DYH*, 2: 183; *HaShira*, #215:1. Written in Egypt. This poem is an indication of HaLevi’s original plan, which was to take the desert route during the winter months. **Line 1:** The poet is addressing God. Tzo’an is a biblical name for Egypt; the holy mountain here is Sinai and the sea is the Red Sea. Psalms 78:12; Numbers 13:22; Exodus 13:18. **2:** A biblical town north of Jerusalem, Shiloh was a center of Israelite worship; the tabernacle was erected there during the time of Joshua. The poet says that he will follow the trail of the ark of the covenant through the desert and to the Land of Israel and the various places it passed through there, including Shiloh and Jerusalem’s shrine. The ark was eventually lost and the place where it was hidden was never discovered (*Yoma* 52b and “Won’t You Ask, Zion,” lines 43–44). Joshua 18:1; Exodus 33:6; 1 Samuel 17:30; Genesis 49:10; Jeremiah 49:2. **3:** Joshua 3:6; Isaiah 49:23; Psalms 19:11. **5–6:** Israel is likened in the midrash to a dove; its enemies to crows or ravens. See “Won’t You Ask, Zion,” line 51; Song of Songs 1:5; Jeremiah 5:3, 50:6; Exodus 12:39; Leviticus 12:8; Psalms 147:9.

## ALONG THE NILE

*DYH*, 1: 112; *HaShira*, #215:3. This lyric—which constitutes the descriptive opening section of a sixty-eight-line qasida—was written between October and December 1140, from Damietta, an important commercial city (eight miles from the Mediterranean) that served as a major link in the transference of goods from Europe to the East. It therefore had a prosperous Jewish community. The poem is part of a reply to a letter from HaLevi’s friend in Cairo, Natan Ibn Shmu’el, who served as secretary to the Egyptian Nagid, Shmu’el ben Hananya. (The remainder of the poem praises his friend in conventional fashion and takes up the theme of his pilgrimage and praise of God.) The scene is the fields around the Nile which are covered with crops and flowers, and the poet describes the young men and women he sees on the banks and walkways along the river. The descriptive metaphors infuse this secular scene with a distinctive religious charge. **Lines 1–2:** These lines reverse the thrust of Ezekiel 26:16: “Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones, and lay away their robes, and strip off their richly woven garments; they shall clothe themselves with trembling.” Also Genesis 27:15–16. **3–4:** Song of Songs 2:10; Isaiah 19:7; Exodus 5:13; Psalms 45:14. **5–6:** The Hebrew specifies Goshen, which might refer to the countryside of the northern delta, or to Egypt generally. The priestly breastplate and vest are from Exodus 28:4ff.: “And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, and an ephod, and a tunic of checquer work . . . and they shall take

the gold, and the blue, and the purple, and the scarlet, and the fine linen. And they shall make the ephod.” **7–8:** Cities in upper Goshen, along the Nile. **9–10:** Ecclesiastes 2:8: “and women very many”—i.e., young women. **11–12:** Isaiah 3:20. **13:** Deuteronomy 11:16: “Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods, and worship them. . . . and the anger of the Lord be kindled against you . . . and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.” **17–18:** Psalms 45:15: “All glorious is the king’s daughter . . . her raiment is of chequer work inwrought with gold.” **19–20:** A western breeze, a harbinger of the wind that would soon take him to the Holy Land.

#### THIS BREEZE

*SQYH*, #413; *DYH*, 2: 171; *HaShira*, #214:4. HaLevi boarded his ship on May 7, but four days later it was still in port. All the boats heading west, for Spain, Tripoli, Sicily, and Byzantium had already sailed, one letter-writer noted, but HaLevi’s ship had to wait for a wind that would take him northeast. Finally, after a week of tense anticipation, on May 14, 1141, on the first day of Shavu’ot, our letter-writer records that “The west wind has risen, the ship has sailed.” This poem was probably written on board, outside the port of Alexandria, just as his boat was preparing to depart. HaLevi would have had time to give the poem to his friend, the businessman Abu Nasser Ibn Avraham, who had boarded the ship to say farewell. (Goitein, along with Fleischer and Gil, think that HaLevi wrote one other short lyric, not translated here, at this time. Other scholars believe this poem might have been written on the earlier leg of the voyage, from the east coast of Spain to Alexandria.) The trip to Acre normally took some ten days. (See Fleischer and Gil, *HaLevi uVenei Hugo*, p. 251.) If Fleischer, Gil, and Goitein are correct, this poem—which is one of his finest—may well be the last word we have from HaLevi. **Lines 1–2:** “We can defend *perfumed sea*,” says Guy Davenport—writing of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Helen”—“which has been called silly, by noting that classical ships never left sight of land, and could smell orchards on shore, that perfumed oil was an extensive industry in classical times and that ships laden with it would smell better than your shipload of sheep” (*The Geography of the Imagination* [San Francisco, 1981], p. 7). **3–4:** Psalms 135:7: “He bringeth forth the wind out of His treasures.” **5–6:** As in “How Long Will You Lie?” (above), the words for “birds” and “freedom” are identical in the Hebrew. Jeremiah 34:17; Exodus 30:28; Song of Songs 1:13. **9:** Joshua 10:6. **11–12:** The hills of the Land of Israel. **13–14:** I.e., rebuking the East for the wind it sends. Psalms 106:9: “And He rebuked the Red Sea, and it was dried up”; Jeremiah 1:13. **15–16:** The poet is still addressing the wind, although he refers to it as, literally, “one who is held back by the Rock,” i.e., the Lord. **18:** Amos 4:13: “For, lo, He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is His thought, that maketh the morning darkness and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the Lord, the God of hosts, is His name.”

## CHRISTIAN SPAIN AND PROVENCE

## AVRAHAM IBN EZRA

The characterization of Ibn Ezra as a “great rebel” is Yosef Tubi’s, in “Avraham Ibn Ezra’s Poetry as a Link in the Transition of Hebrew Poetry in Spain from Its Islamic to Its Christian Period” (in *Abraham Ibn Ezra and His Age: Proceedings of the International Symposium*, ed. Fernando Díaz Esteban [Madrid, 1990]). In addition to breaking new thematic ground, Ibn Ezra was responsible for technical advances in the field, including a return to writing poems in the biblical style, with neither meter nor rhyme. On the whole, however, he maintained the Andalusian quantitative system of meters, though he employed strophic forms more often than his predecessors. He is also responsible for the incorporation of an allegorical strain into the rhymed-prose narrative. *Hai Ben Meqitz*—which was based in part on an Arabic tale by Ibn Sinna—is a long narrative work written before Ibn Ezra’s departure from Spain; its two central figures, the author and his Virgil-like guide, soar over creation as they ascend through the elements and up through the spheres to the realm of wisdom.

## FORTUNE’S STARS

*Yalqut Avraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. I. Levin (Tel Aviv, 1985), hereafter *Yalqut*, #39, #40, and #38, line 5; *HaShira*, #250:1, 2. The suite gathered under this title in English comprises two discrete poems and the final verse from another poem on the same theme. Ibn Ezra wrote several important works on astronomy and astrology. As one writer has put it, for Ibn Ezra “true religion lies in recognizing the place assigned to the stars in the natural order that God has willed” (C. Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge and Paris, 1985/90], p. 106). While this poem is clearly in a light, humorous mode, it emerges from a lifelong preoccupation with the heavens and their influence. Ibn Ezra himself wrote, in his *Sefer HaMivharim*: “He who was born in a [stellar] configuration which is defective relative to the perfect thing cannot become like the one who was born in a perfect configuration. . . . He who has it in his configuration to be poor and without wealth cannot become rich, except for this: because man’s soul comes from a place higher than all the stars, man can by means of his mind mitigate his misfortune somewhat.” The notion of the stars veering off course derives from Ecclesiastes 1:15 and 7:13: “Who can make straight what He has made crooked?” In his commentary to the latter, Ibn Ezra writes: “The wise astrologers understand the verse [in Genesis 2:3], ‘And God rested from all the work that he had done in creation,’ that God delegated to the created [stars] governance of the sublunar world. Therefore if one’s stellar configuration [at birth] is crooked [or thwarts him] in matters of wealth or other [misfortunes] there is no remedy for him” (*Twilight of a Golden Age*, ed. and trans. L. Weinberger [Tuscaloosa, 1997], pp. 66–67).

## HOW IT IS

*Yalqut*, #41; *HaShira*, #249. See note to “Fortune’s Stars.” The poem is not found in the poet’s diwan, but scholars generally attribute the poem to Ibn Ezra. **Line 1:** I.e., expecting a handout from the patron.

## A CLOAK

*Yalqut*, #44; *HaShira*, #251. An excellent example of the “new realism,” in which the subject matter is broadened and further personalized, this time in a self-mocking fashion. **Lines 4–6:** Job 3:4: “Neither let the light shine upon it.” **8:** 2 Samuel 12:31. **13:** Isaiah 61:3: “the mantle of praise [glory/splendor] for the spirit of heaviness.”

## THE FLIES

*Yalqut*, #43, *HaShira*, #252. Ibn Ezra most likely had Ibn Sahl’s poem about the fleas in mind when he wrote this. In any event, he would have been familiar with it. The opening consciously employs the solemn trope and register of poems of lamentation or complaint (see, for example, Avraham Ben Shmu’el’s “To Whom among the Avengers of Blood,” or, for earlier instances, Ibn Gabirol’s “On Leaving Saragossa”), thereby setting up his audience for more of the same. What follows is, of course, something very different. The contrast between the respective relation of man and God to the winged things that surround them plays in the final line on Psalms 99:1: “He [God] is enthroned upon the cherubim.” In Jewish tradition God, or the presence of God, is said to rest between the two [winged] cherubim that lie over the synagogue ark in which the Torah is held.

## WORLD POETRY

*Qovetz Hokhmat HaR. Avraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. D. Kahana (Warsaw, 1922), Part 1, #66 (hereafter *Qovetz Ibn Ezra*); *HaShira*, #255. Attributed to Ibn Ezra. **Line 1:** Literally, “love and pleasure”; “boasts,” which has been interpolated for sound, picks up both on the Arabic poetic genre of *fakhr* (boasting) and the demonstrative nature of its bawdier poetry. In one of his liturgical poems, Ibn Ezra writes: “The songs of the nations are founded on nothing, and so I sing to the God of the chosen.”

## ALL THE REST IS COMMENTARY

## I. THE FLOOD

*Qovetz Ibn Ezra*, #19. This poem, like the two that follow, serve as preludes to sections of Ibn Ezra’s extensive biblical commentaries. See Genesis 9:11–17, for the story of the covenant of the rainbow; Isaiah 54:9: “For this to me is like the waters of Noah.” This poem has also been attributed to Yehuda Alharizi (*Masei Yehuda*, ed. Y. Blau and Y. Yahalom [Jerusalem, 2002], #65).

## II. READING EXODUS

I. Levin, *Avraham Ibn Ezra, Hayyav veShirato* (Tel Aviv, 1969), p. 219. This poem serves as the motto to Ibn Ezra's commentary to Exodus and the weekly reading, or *parasha*, beginning *Beshalah* (Exodus 13:17: "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh let the people go . . ."). The last line reads, literally: "Observe, you who are wicked, and take to heart the entire matter of Pharaoh and the *parasha* of Beshalah."

## III. THE MIRACLE (AT LEHI)

N. Ben Menahem, "Tlunot HaRav Avraham Ibn Ezra 'al Ro'a Mazalo," *Sinai* 24 (1949): 71. Also in Levin, *Avraham Ibn Ezra, Hayyav veShirato*, p. 206. While the manuscript in question notes that this is by Ibn Ezra, the attribution is questionable. **Lines 3–4:** Genesis 26:19; Song of Songs 4:15; Judges 15:14–19, where Samson used the jawbone (*lehi*) of an ass to kill a thousand Philistines and then, when he complained of thirst, was rewarded by God: "And it came to pass . . . that he cast away the jawbone . . . and that place was called Ramath-lehi [Jawbone Heights]. . . [And] God cleaved the hollow that is in Lehi, and there came water thereout."

## PLEASURE

*Qovetz Ibn Ezra*, #54. Attributed to Ibn Ezra.

## IN PLACE

*Qovetz Ibn Ezra*, #5. The repeated use of the word "place" in this poem plays on several rabbinic sayings and conventions. **Line 1:** *Ta'anit* 21b: "It is not the place that honors the man, it is the man who honors the place"; *Bekhorot* 30b: "Let the dignity of the elder lie undisturbed in its place." **5:** "The Place" (*HaMaqom*) is a common epithet for God, the Omnipresent. **6:** *Berakhot* 16b: "As they say to a man for his ox and his ass: 'May the Almighty replenish your loss.'"

## THE WEDDING NIGHT, CONTINUED

*Qovetz Ibn Ezra*, #49. This poem is Ibn Ezra's reply—in the same Hebrew meter and with the same Hebrew rhyme—to Ibn Tzaddiq's poem sympathizing with his plight on his wedding night. (See the note to Ibn Tzaddiq's "A Wedding Night's Consolation" for details of the situation and the relevant laws of ritual purity.) Ibn Ezra's poem also contains the same number of lines and employs the same circular structure. Given the content of the two poems, it's all the more interesting to keep in mind that Ibn Tzaddiq was the *dayyan*, or religious judge, of Cordoba. **Line 11:** Genesis 18:13. "Rivers of Eden" here implies both the menstrual flow from the womb and pleasure (*'edna*) lost. **14:** I.e., I'm blinded by the light;

I can look but not touch. There may also be a very distant echo here of the Mishnaic term *saris hama*, “castrated of the sun,” i.e., born castrated, castrated before one saw the sun (*Yebamot* 8:4). **17:** The signs that the menstrual period is over and there is no blood. In other words, Ibn Ezra took a lenient view of the laws of ritual purity. After her period was over, but before she had waited an additional seven days to be ritually immersed (after the period rabbinic law calls for seven days of *libun*, cleaning or whitening, during which white, *lavan*, garments are worn), he engaged in what sounds like the medieval version of heavy petting with his bride, i.e., sexual contact short of intercourse. That he is boasting of this to his friend the religious judge would seem to indicate that a certain laxity in the application of the law was not uncommon. *Shabbat* 13a gives a sense of just how seriously these days of *libun* were normally taken: “It is taught in the [midrash] *Tanna devei Eliyahu*: It once happened that a certain scholar who had studied much Bible and Mishna, and had served scholars much, yet died in middle age. His wife took his *tefillin* and carried them about in synagogues and schoolhouses and complained, ‘It is written in the Torah, *for that is thy life, and the length of thy days* (Deuteronomy 30:20): my husband who read [Bible], learning [Mishna], and served scholars much, why did he die in middle age?’ And no man could answer her. On one occasion I [Elijah, the supposed author of the text being cited], was a guest at her house, and she related the whole story to me. Said I to her: ‘My daughter! How was he to thee in thy days of menstruation?’ ‘God forbid!’ she rejoined; ‘he did not touch me even with his little finger.’ ‘And how was he to thee in thy days of white [garments]?’ ‘He ate with me, drank with me, and slept with me in bodily contact, and it did not occur to him to do other.’ Said I to her: ‘Blessed be the Omnipresent for slaying him!’” **21:** Job 21:24. **22:** Literally, “as a Nazarite goes around the vineyard [to avoid it].” *Avodah Zarah* 17a: “Even mere approach is forbidden because we say to a Nazarite, ‘Go, go—round about; but do not approach the vineyard’”—to be on the safe side. The Nazarite, or ascetic, has vowed to abstain from wine. **24:** That is, not yet having immersed herself in the ritual bath, which is filled with running water or rainwater. Ibn Ezra’s word here, *gushma*, seems to be derived from the root yielding *geshem*, rain, as in Ezekiel 22:24: “You are an uncleansed land, not to be washed with rain,” i.e., she’s pure according to the seven-day biblical standard, but not yet ritually immersed and ready for intercourse. **27:** Another manuscript reads: “But what would any of this be worth?” **30:** The Hebrew ‘*ad hormah* (to the point of total destruction) involves an inversion of *rahma* (her womb) and implies penetration and defloration.

#### AN ANCIENT BATTLE

*Qovetz Ibn Ezra*, #118; *HaShira*, #259. One of three poems Ibn Ezra wrote about chess, and possibly the earliest poetic record in European literature of the game, which some say was introduced to Spain by Ziryaab (though this has never been proven). Chess was a popular pastime for Jews in the Middle Ages, and it is mentioned by several prominent commentators. (Maimonides forbade playing for

money.) The medieval rules varied slightly from modern practice. See I. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia, 1896/1958), pp. 388ff.; Weinberger, *Twilight of a Golden Age*, p. 128; and Ree Hans, “Ziryab the Musician,” in *The Human Comedy of Chess: A Grandmaster’s Chronicles* (Milford, CT, 1999). In Hebrew the poem rhymes in couplets—the equivalent of the quatrain in translation. **Lines 16–28:** Literally, “Cushites,” or “black men,” and “Edomites,” which is derived from the biblical “Edom” and the word for “red” (*adom*); it always refers to Christians in the medieval Spanish context, and here it suggests skin color as well. In the Middle Ages, black opened the game, and the pawns, or foot soldiers, could move three spaces in any direction. **29:** The queen—who was known as the *paraz* (leader or ruler [Habakkuk 3:14])—was allowed to move only one space at a time, in any direction. **33:** The “bishop” was known as “the elephant” and could advance within a range of only three spaces. **37:** Literally, “the horse,” which is what today’s “knight” was called. **41:** Our word “rook” comes from the Persian (and Arabic) *rukḥ*, which in turn gave rise to the Hebrew *rokh*. **54:** I.e., if the opponent declares “Check!”

#### LAMENT FOR ANDALUSIAN JEWRY

*Yalqut*, #35. The Hebrew is in syllabics, rather than quantitative meter, with regular internal rhyme as well as final monorhyme. A *qina*, or lament, for the Jewish communities of Spain and North Africa that were destroyed by the invading Almohads in 1146. This poem was written while Ibn Ezra was in the south of France, and the poet was, as Ross Brann points out, no doubt responding to reports that reached him from al-Andalus and North Africa. The plainness of the diction, imagery, and rhetorical figuration is in keeping with the grave nature of the situation described, and the poem is distinctive for its uncharacteristically physical and objective treatment of calamity and exile—at least until the final stanza and its confession. The standard medieval treatment of exile and loss in liturgical works was essentially metaphysical, moral, or psychological. See, for instance, Yehuda HaLevi’s “A Doe Far from Home,” “A Dove in the Distance,” “You Slept, Then Trembling Rose,” and Avraham Ben Shmu’el’s “To Whom among the Avengers of Blood.” While Ibn Ezra speaks here for the entire congregation of Israel, the poem wasn’t included in North African prayer books and was probably not intended for recitation as part of the liturgy; contemporary editors of Ibn Ezra’s poems place it among his secular works. For more detailed literary and historical analysis of this poem, see Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, pp. 182–84; Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*, pp. 121–26, and “Tavni’ot shel Galut,” in *Sefer Yisrael Levin*, pp. 51–54; and Weinberger, *Twilight of a Golden Age*, p. 99. **Lines 1–2:** Lamentations 1:16. Weinberger notes that the opening line is “an inversion of the rabbinic comment in Genesis Rabbah 51:3 that “nothing evil descends from above.” Likewise, in contrast to the Jerusalem of Lamentations, Lucena is depicted as being innocent. **3:** Lamentations 4:3. For more on Lucena,

see biographical notes on Ibn Mar Sha'ul and Ibn Ghiyyat. **5:** The approximate time passed since the destruction of the Second Temple. **6:** Lamentations 1:1. **10:** I.e., became a mosque. **12:** Jeremiah 8:23. Seville's Jewish community was almost completely destroyed. **15:** I.e., they were forced to convert to Islam. **16:** Lamentations 2:13. **23:** Psalms 58:8. **24:** Sijilmasa: a city in western Morocco. **30–32:** Telsemen is today in northwestern Algeria; Ceuta, in northern Morocco, on the Straits of Gibraltar; Meknes, also in northern Morocco. Der'a was an important Moroccan Jewish community. **33:** Psalms 79:3. **34:** At this point the *ubi sunt*-like catalogue of communities comes to an end, and the poet begins his confessional conclusion. See the penitential poem by Avraham Ben Shmu'el ("To Whom among the Avengers of Blood") for a similar gesture in the wake of loss. **38:** I.e., strayed from Spain, or possibly the Land of Israel, or both. Calling this the most fascinating line in the poem, Ross Brann notes how exile from Spain is merged into the larger exile from the Land of Israel, just as the personal voice of the exiled poet is blended with that of the community of Israel. Seeing their situation as part and parcel of the larger history of Israel, the new exiles would be strengthened and better able to bear the hardship of their circumstances. As such the confession of guilt at the end of the poem seeks to return to the metaphysical plane of redemption, without losing touch with the physical (or political) plane of actual exile and deliverance. **43–44:** Lamentations 1:2, 3:50. The handmaiden here alludes to Hagar, Ishmael's mother, i.e., the Muslims, and the Almohads in particular.

#### ELEGY FOR A SON

*Yalqut*, #36. Scholarly readings of this poem differ markedly, with the majority understanding it as a powerful personal elegy for the poet's own son, Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra (see the biographical introduction to his poems, above, and the notes to that section). According to this personal reading, the poem was written three years after his son Yitzhaq's death, when news of his demise (in the East) finally reached Avraham. Some scholars have suggested that the poem is not about a physical death at all but about the son's conversion to Islam—though this has been a minority opinion. Ezra Fleischer, on the other hand, noting the oddness of the opening and the absence of any editorial comment about a personal context (*Toldot* [1995], pp. 82–85), says that this poem isn't about Avraham Ibn Ezra's son at all; it's a standard (traditional) eulogy, of the sort that Yehuda HaLevi and the other poets were often asked to write for their communities—(though this doesn't necessarily mean it is any less powerful). The opening, he says, is a kind of prelude, in which the poet summons the boy's father. Likewise, the end of the poem involves a return of the poet's voice, and a summation of the father's situation. The poem involves no mention of Yitzhaq's conversion because Yitzhaq converted (and died) after his father had already passed away. Furthermore, the Geniza records show that Avraham Ibn Ezra may have had more than one son (*HaLevi uVenei Hugo*, pp. 150, 420). I have adopted Fleischer's interpretation, which

seems to rest on sound textual evidence, though earlier scholars' evaluation of the poem's merits still seem to me to apply. **Lines 1–4:** The poet calls to the father to come forward in his grief. Genesis 22:iff., and the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. "And [the Lord] said unto [Abraham] . . . Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac." **5:** The father speaks. Lamentations 3:1: "I am the man who has seen affliction." **11–12:** Isaiah 65:23: "They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for terror; for they are the seed blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." **14:** Genesis 35:29. **15–16:** Lamentations 1:2; Micah 2:4. **19:** Isaac left Spain with Yehuda HaLevi and set sail for Egypt. There they parted ways, with HaLevi heading for Jerusalem and Isaac, it seems, for Baghdad. **21:** The circumstances referred to here are not clear. **24:** Genesis 25:21. **25:** The Hebrew is addressed to a single "friend" or "companion." **29:** 2 Samuel 14:7. **33:** Psalms 73:26; Genesis 27:30; Psalms 90:1. **35:** The father's speech has come to a close and the poet appeals on his behalf to God. **38:** Jeremiah 34:18. **44:** Genesis 24:14.

#### MY HUNGER

*Shirei Qodesh shel R. Avraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. I. Levin (Tel Aviv, 1980), #32 (hereafter *SQA Ibn Ezra*). A *reshut*. Acrostic: *Avraham*. **Line 6:** 1 Samuel 2:1. **8:** I.e., to Muslims and Christians. **10:** A distinction is normally made in medieval Jewish thought between the three spiritual aspects of man: *nefesh*, *ru'ah*, and *neshama* (loosely: heart [or appetite], spirit, and soul).

#### SENT OUT FROM THE GLORY

*SQA Ibn Ezra*, #30; *HaShira*, #263:1. A *reshut* to the *qaddish*. Acrostic: *Avraham*. **Line 1:** In the Neoplatonic scheme the soul emanates from Intellect. **2:** The "four living creatures" of the chariot in Ezekiel 1:5ff., which bear the Throne of Glory, from which souls emanate and to which they return after death (*Shabbat* 152b). According to Ibn Ezra's commentary to Psalms 8:4, the tenth heavenly sphere (the sphere of Intellect) is the Throne of Glory. **4:** Ibn Ezra's commentary to Genesis 1:26 reads, in part: "He is the One. He made all. He is all. And this I cannot explain [or, I cannot explain any further]." See also Ibn Gabirol's "I Love You" for a similar suggestion of pantheism. **6:** Proverbs 20:27. **8:** Job 36:4. **9:** Implying perhaps the word of your prayer, but also more. **10:** Literally, "until His mercy brought you." **12:** The last line suggests that the poem leads into the recitation of the *qaddish*: "May His great name be exalted and hallowed."

#### LORD, I HAVE HEARD

*SQA Ibn Ezra*, #26. A *baqasha*. Acrostic: *Avraham*. **Lines 2–3:** The translation here is based on commentary by Israel Levin, who notes that the lines are obscure. **12:** Numbers 14:20: "And the Lord said: 'I pardon, as you have asked'" (NJPS).

## MY GOD,

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #27. A *reshut* for the festival of Shemini 'Atzeret. Acrostic: *Avraham*  
**Line 1:** Psalms 24:4. **2:** The body in the Neoplatonic scheme (and the medieval scheme generally—see, for example, HaNagid's "Earth to Man" and Ibn Gabirol's "Heart's Hollow") is seen as a prison to the soul. **3–4:** See notes to "Sent Out from the Glory," line 2 (above). **5–6:** In the Hebrew these lines are cast in the third person. Psalms 40:6. **7–8:** Psalms 147:15ff.: "He sends forth His word to the earth . . . He lays down snow like fleece, scatters frost like ashes" (NJPS). **9–10:** God's "servants" (literally, "emissaries") would seem to refer to the cherubim of Ezekiel 1:10, who bear the divine chariot and have a human face at the front, a lion on the right, an ox on the left, and an eagle at the back. I. Levin also notes that Ibn Ezra may be alluding to the signs of the zodiac in their spheres and the influence they have over events on earth.

## TO THE SOUL

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #31. Acrostic: *Avraham Hazaq*. **Lines 1–2:** A description of the soul. See notes to "Sent Out from the Glory" (below). **4:** Ecclesiastes 10:1: "So doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor." **7:** "Its sleep" refers to the soul's time in the body—human life, which is seen as illusive. **10:** I.e., exiled from its divine source, to which it desires to return. Isaiah 49:21: "An exile, wandering to and fro." **11:** Knowledge of the soul within will lead to knowledge of its source. **14:** 1 Samuel 25:29: "The life of my lord will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of the Lord; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling."

## BLESSÈD IS HE WHO FEARS

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #254. A *seliha*. Acrostic: *Avraham Bar Me'ir Ben Ezra* *Nehamato*. "In a certain sense Ibn Ezra does not accept exterior revelation, only interior vision. . . . Perhaps the angel who speaks to the prophet is his own soul. . . . He who speaks is man and he who listens is man" (Colette Sirat, *History of Jewish Philosophy* [Cambridge, 1985], p. 108). **Line 1:** Psalms 1:1: "Happy [blessed] is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners." **2:** I.e., the voice that reminds him of all that follows. **4:** Isaiah 2:22: "Oh, cease to glorify man, who has only a breath in his nostrils! For by what does he merit esteem?" (NJPS). **5:** Psalms 78:39. **6:** Genesis 3:19: "Until you return to the ground—for from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (NJPS). **7:** Isaiah 59:19: "For distress will come in like a flood, which the breath of the Lord driveth." **13:** Nehemiah 2:6. **16–17:** Ecclesiastes 3:19: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts . . . as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity [vapor]." Also Psalms 144:4: "For man is like unto breath."

**23:** The defilement and impurity that come with death. Numbers 19:11ff. and Leviticus 7:20. **29:** Ezekiel 2:10. **35–36:** Exodus 16:20. **47:** Zechariah 14:12: “Their flesh shall rot away . . . and the tongue shall rot away in their mouths.” **53:** Ecclesiastes 12:3: “And the ladies that peer through the windows grow dim.” **59:** Ecclesiastes 3:19: “All is vanity (*hevel*)” or “all amounts to nothing.” *Hevel* in Hebrew literally indicates vapor. **61:** Literally, “Encompass him with your word.” **65:** Job 2:6: “Only spare his life [soul].”

#### I Bow Down

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #298; *HaShira*, #269. A *rehuta*. Acrostic: *Avraham Ezrah* (each letter twice). This poem is unique in Ibn Ezra’s work, as it dispenses entirely with meter and rhyme, which are replaced here by a biblical-style prosody and parallelism—along with considerable internal rhyme. Schirmann notes that “indeed the spirit of biblical poetry hovers over [this poem],” which, he says, treats matters that are sublime and profound, and presents a curious mixture of emotional turbulence and seemingly restrained intellectual analysis. **Line 1:** Genesis 48:12; 1 Kings 1:23, and more. **3:** Psalms 9:3, 21:8. **4:** I.e., higher. **6:** Zechariah 4:6: “not by might or by power, but by my spirit”; Psalms 51:18–19: “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit”; and Job 12:10: “[The Lord] in whose hand is the soul of every living thing.” In Ibn Ezra’s Neoplatonic worldview, the supernal soul is part of the divinity. **7–8:** The heart is considered the best, or purest, place in the body, for in a sense it is *not* physical: Ibn Ezra in his commentary to Genesis 1:1 calls it “the first chariot of the soul.” (Soul here is not to be confused with the appetitive *nefesh*—also called “soul”—which appears in Arabic and Arabic-influenced medieval poetry). **8:** Isaiah 66:1–2; Deuteronomy 10:14. **18:** Psalms 60:13: “For vain is the help of man.” **25–26:** Numbers 15:39: “Do not follow your heart and your eyes in your lustful urge.” **29:** Jeremiah 49:16. **32:** Others understand the noun in question—*zil’afa*—to mean “rage” or “burning indignation” as in Psalms 119:53. **33:** Lamentations 1:20. **37:** Psalms 143:8. **40:** 1 Kings 8:32: “Then hear Thou in heaven.”

#### CHILDREN OF EXILE

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #232. A *seliha*. Acrostic: The first letter of each word runs through the alphabet and then the first letters of the next five words spell *Avraham*. **Line 1:** Lamentations 3:1. **4:** Habakkuk 1:2. **5:** *Baba Batra* 12b: “Since the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from prophets and given to fools and children.” **9:** Psalms 88:16: “I suffer your terrors wherever I turn” (NJPS). **11:** Literally, “with the humble one’s prayer we approach you.” Numbers 12:3: “Now Moses was a very humble man” (NJPS). **12:** Literally, “against your people.” Exodus 32:11: “But Moses implored the Lord, saying: ‘Let not your anger blaze forth against your people’” (NJPS).

## I CALL TO HIM

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #184; *HaShira*, #271. *Reshut* to the *qaddish*, in a strophic form. Acrostic: *Avram*. **Lines 1–2:** Daniel 11:36; Psalms 16:6. These lines echo the *qaddish* of the liturgy and indicate that this poem is a prelude to that prayer. “Magnified [exalted] and sanctified be the name of God throughout the world. . . . Exalted and honored be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, whose glory transcends all praises, hymns [songs], and blessings that man can render unto Him.” **6:** Cf. Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Genesis 1:1 (above, note to “I Bow Down,” line 8). **10:** Isaiah 40:17. **13–14:** Cf. Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Psalms 8:4 and 103:21 on the structure of the spheres and the placement of the throne. **16:** Based on Psalms 104:3, the meaning of which has long been disputed. The biblical verse has traditionally been translated: “Who layest the beams of Thine upper chambers in the waters,” but it has been (rightfully) argued that this image is blurred. My translation, then, is based on the Anchor Bible’s understanding of the line. See *The Anchor Bible: Psalms III*, ed. Mitchell Dahood (Garden City, 1970), p. 34. **17:** Job 26:13: “By His breath the heavens are serene.”

## YOU WHOSE HEARTS ARE ASLEEP

SQA *Ibn Ezra*, #237. *Tokheha*. Acrostic: *Avraham Ezrah Hazaq*. **Lines 3–4:** *Avot* 3:1: “Akabja ben Mahalel said: Keep in view three things and thou wilt not come into the power of sin. Know whence thou comest and whither thou goest and before whom thou art to give strict account.” **7:** The soul descends from the Divine, and so contemplation of it will lead to knowledge of God. **8:** Job 19:26: “But I would behold God while still in my flesh” (NJPS). This highly charged verse in Job has been understood numerous ways, from the preceding Neoplatonic interpretation to a near-panteistic reading. **9:** The microcosm of man and his soul, which is in the image of the macrocosm. This was a common medieval understanding, and Ibn Ezra mentions it explicitly in his commentary to Genesis 1:28: “The body of man is like a microcosm.” **11:** Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Genesis 1:1, where he states that the heart is the soul’s first chariot.” **13:** Literally, “Your head is the house *it/He* dwells in.” The referent of the (masculine) pronoun in the Hebrew isn’t clear. Grammatically it would seem to refer to God, or the “heart” of line 11. Levin notes that it stands for the Active Intellect (grammatically feminine), which emanates in the Neoplatonic scheme from God and contains, therefore, elements of the divine. In his commentary to Genesis 1:1, Ibn Ezra states: “The heavenly soul of man is called heart, although the heart is a body, and the soul [feminine] is incorporeal, since the heart is the principal seat [chariot] [of the Lord]” (M. Friedlaender, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra* [London, 1877], p. 20). The catalogue of body parts and the overall analogy resembles that of Ecclesiastes 12:3–4. **31:** The four elements combine in man along with the four humors (dryness, moisture, heat, and cold), and they are united only by means of the soul. **33:** I.e., the soul. **38:** In [the ruined body] you will see worms. **43:** Ecclesiastes

3:18–21. 50–51: From Ibn Ezra’s commentary to Exodus 20: “From the ways of the Name the learned man will know the Name.” Also, his commentary to Exodus 31:28: “He will not know Him if He does not know his [own] soul and spirit and body.” 52: Job 36:22: “Who is a leader like unto Him?”

#### YITZHAQ IBN EZRA

Ibn Ezra’s character is sketched by Ezra Fleischer in *Toldot* (1997), pp. 71ff. The twelfth-century manuscript containing the poems that Yitzhaq wrote after his departure from Spain was purchased in Aleppo, Syria, by a collector and poetry lover, around 1902, but the new owner turned down various offers for it made by scholars in Berlin and Jerusalem, and what is known as the Silvera manuscript remained in Aleppo. During World War II and its aftermath all traces of it disappeared, and scholars assumed it was lost. It resurfaced with the Silvera family only in 1967, and scholars gained access to it in 1970. The poems themselves were published in a critical edition nine years later. A partial edition of Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra’s work, based on other sources, had appeared in 1950.

#### ON THE DEATH OF YEHUDA HALEVI

*Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra, Shirim*, ed. M. Schmelzer (New York, 1979), p. 20, lines 13–30. See also Fleischer and Gil, *HaLevi uVenei Hugo*, pp. 167–71. **Heading:** “And the speaker wrote to his father informing him of the death of his relative.” While neither the heading nor the poem explicitly mention HaLevi, scholars agree that it is almost certainly about the great poet. The poem would, then, most likely have been written in Fustat (Old Cairo), sometime around late June or early July 1141, and sent to Avraham Ibn Ezra in Italy. Its elegiac opening (lines 1–12, not translated here) presents a picture of the world in mourning: the skies have gone dark, the sea is storm-tossed—like the speaker himself, who weeps. The translation picks up with the central section of the qasida, which describes the poet’s solitude and explains the cause of his grief. Ibn Ezra had considerable trouble in Egypt after HaLevi’s departure for Acre: he became embroiled in bitter quarrels and failed to find either patronage or employment. Soon he was lashing out at various community leaders in venomous poems. **Lines 1–2:** Lamentations 3:1; Job 20:8. **3–6:** Isaiah 44:14; Leviticus 6:6; 1 Samuel 20:41. Ibn Ezra also alludes directly to a poem of HaLevi’s here (*Diwan*, 2:279, lines 15–19), one which is dedicated to the “brothers Ibn Ezra.” The figure of the blood in one’s tears is a standard Arabic image of powerful sadness: behind it lies the notion that the blood has risen from the heart to the eyes. **7–8:** Psalms 129:3; Genesis 37:7. **9–10:** Ecclesiastes 12:4; Jeremiah 8:7; Leviticus 26:36. **11–12:** Job 5:1; Psalms 139:7. **13–14:** Exodus 30:23, 25; Song of Songs 1:13; Ecclesiastes 10:1. **15–16:** Fate (or Time, in the medieval understanding) as the subject is implicit in the original. Ibn Ezra again quotes a poem by HaLevi here.

(See his poem to Moshe Ibn Ezra in this volume, “On Friendship and Time.”) The arm rings and jewels are indications of friendship. **17–18:** Joel 2:10; Numbers 24:3—though in this context the phrase means he is, figuratively, blind or lost, without HaLevi’s guidance. **19–20:** Daniel 1:10; Job 17:16, 26:6. It should be kept in mind that Yitzhaq is writing here to his real father, Avraham. **21–24:** Proverbs 3:35; Daniel 12:9. **23:** Literally, “wisdom went still and turned to folly.” **25–26:** Isaiah 24:9; Numbers 30:4. **27–28:** Job 31:18; Psalms 16:6: “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places,” i.e., my lot is pleasant. Fleischer calculates that Yitzhaq most likely married HaLevi’s daughter when he was eighteen, but, he adds, the ties between the two families no doubt went back to Yitzhaq’s childhood. **29–32:** 2 Kings 7:9; Psalms 34:5; Deuteronomy 6:11: “and houses full of all good things” and 28:8: “The Lord will command the blessing with thee in thy barns.” **33–34:** Exodus 16:15; Job 30:4: “The roots of broom are their food.” **35–36:** Job 5:1; Ecclesiastes 7:26. These lines mark the transition to the final section of the qasida (not translated here), in which the speaker turns to Avraham, his father, asking him both to return to Spain to care for two people whom he does not mention explicitly—possibly Yitzhaq’s brothers, as Fleischer and Gil speculate in *HaLevi*, p. 171—and to answer this poem and the letter it accompanies.

#### OVER HIS BOY

*Shirim Hadashim min HaGeniza*, p. 281. This poem surfaced in the mid-sixties, when it was published in Schirmann’s collection of poems from the Cairo Geniza, alongside two other poems by Avraham Ibn Ezra’s son. It does not appear, however, in the Silvera manuscript of poems, and the editor of the critical edition of Ibn Ezra’s poems based on that manuscript places it in the section of poems attributed to Ibn Ezra but of uncertain provenance (*Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra, Shirim*, p. 146). Ezra Fleischer on the other hand, makes a strong case for removing the attribution to Yitzhaq altogether (*Toldot* [1997], p. 75). The vivid depiction of the old man and the boy caught in the act apart, the poem is of interest for what seems to be its explicit condemnation of homosexuality (a trend that will develop as the poetry moves out of Muslim Andalusia and into Christian lands). That condemnation would seem to be at odds with the often stunning homoerotic poetry of the classical Andalusian period (beginning with Yitzhaq Ibn Mar Sha’ul). Matti Huss notes, however, that the objection here is not necessarily to homoeroticism per se, so much as to the combination of the ugly and the beautiful, the young and the old, which violates the medieval aesthetic, with its Platonic identification of the beautiful and the good, the ugly and the bad. Be that as it may, the poem is also noteworthy as an example of the emergent new realism in this work. See M. Huss, “‘Mahberet Shali’ah Ha’Tzibbur: leShe’lat Meqoroteiha veZiqatha leSifrut Ha’Ivrit HaHomoerotit beYemei HaBenayim,” *Tarbiz* 72/1–2 (2003) pp: 219–20. For other poems treating homoeroticism as a subject of controversy, see, in this volume, Yehuda Alharizi, “Boys: Two Poems.”

**Lines 1–2:** Jeremiah 9:9: “From the mountains will I take up a weeping and a wailing, and from the pastures of the wilderness a lament.” **3:** Micah 1:8: “I will make a wailing like a jackal.” **7–8:** I.e., he tended to fall in with the wrong crowd. Proverbs 22:24. **11–12:** Psalms 14:1: “They have dealt corruptly, they have done abominably”; Proverbs 20:2; Psalms 78:21; Proverbs 26:17. **13:** Jeremiah 20:8. **21:** Exodus 27:4. **26:** Genesis 49:27.

## CONVERSION

*Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra, Shirim*, p. 147; *HaShira*, #287. Fleischer suggests that the conversion poem is most likely not by Ibn Ezra. A recent Geniza finding attributes it to a twelfth-century Eastern scholar, Barukh Ben Melekh (*Toldot* [1997], p. 79). Only one late manuscript attributes it to Ibn Ezra, and in most manuscripts there is no attribution at all. Schirmann’s anthology, however, does attribute it to Ibn Ezra, and in the critical edition of Ibn Ezra’s poems, it appears in the section of poems of uncertain provenance. **Line 2:** Zephaniah 3:13; 2 Chronicles 19:7. **3–8:** Genesis 49:9, 38:1; 2 Samuel 13:1 and more—all biblical episodes indicating that even the great figures of the Jewish people have erred at times and sinned. Amram’s son is Moses. **11–12:** I.e., if I tell my fellow Jews that the Prophet (Muhammad) is a madman, but because of my circumstances am forced to acknowledge him with every blessing. . . . “Madman” was a common medieval epithet among Jews for Muhammad. Another possible reading of these lines is “if I say (in public) that a madman’s a prophet, and with every blessing acknowledge him.” **13–14:** The implication here is that the conversion was only outward—and perhaps performed under duress or simply in a moment of weakness—while inwardly the poet has continued to be (or gone back to being) a believing Jew. **15–16:** Literally, “I’ve returned . . .”

## YOSEF QIMHI

By “ordinary mysticism” I mean not qabbalistic speculation or vision but the sort of sacred linkage implied by the standard liturgy. See Max Kadushin, *Worship and Ethics* (New York, 1963), pp. 13–18, where he talks of the “normal mysticism of the common man.”

## LOVE FOR THE WORLD

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, ed. Hermann Gollancz (London, 1919), #96; *HaShira*, #288:1.

## ALWAYS BE VIGILANT

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #399; *HaShira*, #288:7.

## CONSIDER THIS

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #376; *HaShira*, #288:6.

## SUFFER YOUR SORROW

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #73.

## ON WISDOM

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #33 and #49.

## IF YOU HEAR SOMEONE INSULT YOU

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #61 and #62.

## WAIT AND BE SAVED

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #161.

## WEALTH

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #86 and #103.

## SILENCE AND SPEECH

*Sheqel HaQodesh*, #241 and #235. **Line 8:** I have translated Gollancz's text, though it doesn't suit the meter. A more metrical solution would yield *lasimo ben lehayyim* (to put it between the cheeks), but that would repeat the image of line 4.

## YOSEF IBN ZABARA

Schirmann points out that there is no hard evidence of Ibn Zabara's having gone to study in Narbonne. One of the town's sages, Yosef Qimhi (the poet, see above), mentions the opinions or readings of "the student R. Yosef Ibn Zabara" in his commentary to the biblical Book of Proverbs.

## SWEET AND SOUR

*Sefer Sha'ashu'im*, ed. Israel Davidson (Berlin, 1925), chapter 8, p. 90. This poem is unattributed and appears in the context of a discussion of eating habits and good

health, in the course of which Plato, Galen, Diogenes, and many others are quoted alongside anonymous proverbs put in the mouths of a Roman, Indian, Babylonian, and Arab.

#### MY EX

*Sefer Sha'ashu'im*, chapter 12, p. 141; *HaShira*, #310, lines 71–75. This is one of three poems in *Sefer Sha'ashu'im* that Davidson attributes to Ibn Zabara directly. In the narrative the poet's companion recites this poem, saying it is about his first wife. In the Hebrew the poem is cast in the present tense. The anatomical emphasis is characteristic of Ibn Zabara, the physician and physician's son. **Line 3:** Job 4:21. **8:** Isaiah 40:22. **9:** Job 6:3. **10:** Job 30:27, 41:23.

#### LOOK AT THESE PEOPLE

*Sefer Sha'ashu'im*, chapter 6, p. 63. This chapter treats religious hypocrisy. **Line 3:** 1 Samuel 2:3. **8:** Judges 5:8; *Yebamot* 115a. **10:** Their only righteousness amounts to unctuous exaggerations of emphases at prayer. See Ibn Gabirol's "The Bee" for a discussion of how the Shema' should be recited. **12:** That is, until they're like Hevel (Abel in Hebrew), which also means "vapor."

#### THE PHYSICIAN

*Sefer Sha'ashu'im*, chapter 10, p. 123. This poem also appears in Ibn Falaqera's *Book of the Seeker*.

#### ANATOLI BAR YOSEF

While the name "Anatoli" is Greek in origin and hardly Jewish, it was given to more than a few Provençal Jews. It is a translation of the Hebrew "Zarhaya" (literally, the light bearer).

#### THE TEST OF POETRY

*Shirei Anatoli Bar Yosef*, ed. E. Cohen, M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, no date), #57. See also M. Stern, "A Twelfth-Century Circle of Hebrew Poets in Sicily," *JJS* 5 (1956): 112. **Heading:** "And Anatoli, of blessed memory, wrote to a man who turned to him with a weak poem." **Line 2:** Or, "in the furnace of form." **5:** Proverbs 20:5. **10:** Literally, "choose pure diction." **11:** Literally, "Don't weary yourself and pile up words." Ecclesiastes 1:8: "All things toil to weariness; man cannot utter it." **14:** Psalms 139:16. **15–16:** Psalms 41:2.

**17–18:** Literally, “What was sown there [or, its seed] were thirsty.” Isaiah 61:11.  
**19–20:** *Sheqalim* 2:4: “a minted coin”; *Baba Qama* 97a: “Where the government declared [a] coin obsolete it would be tantamount to its being disfigured . . . and the inhabitants of a particular province rejected it while it was still in circulation in another province.” **27–28:** Proverbs 2:2, 4: “So that thou make thine ear attend unto wisdom, and thy heart incline to discernment; . . . If thou seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”

#### MOTTO

*Shirei Anatoli*, #9. **Heading:** The book’s motto [or, a dedication]. **Line 1:** Genesis 33:14: “I will journey on gently. . . .” **4:** I.e., he will fill the stanzas and lines of his poems with love and strong feeling.

#### YEHUDA IBN SHABBETAI

While the work is generally thought to have been written in 1188, Huss is of the opinion that in fact it was written in 1208. Detailed discussion of Ibn Shabbetai’s life and work can be found in *Minhat Yehuda*, ed. M. Huss, Ph.D. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, 1991), hereafter *Minhat Yehuda*, a revised version of which is forthcoming in book form. For a feminist reading of the *maqama*, see Tova Rosen’s *Unveiling Eve*, which notes that, at the very least, *Minhat Yehuda* expresses “the qualms and ambivalence of the contemporary intellectual Jewish milieu” when it came to the sacred Jewish institution of wedlock (p. 123). See also her remarks about the associative (feminine) field that is built up around notions of, on the one hand, the world (*dunya/tevel*) and, on the other, the soul (*nafs/nefesh*) in Arabic and Hebrew.

#### FROM *THE OFFERING OF YEHUDA THE MISOGYNIST*

##### I. Pharaoh’s Wisdom

*Minhat Yehuda*, ed. M. Huss, lines 137ff.; *HaShira*, #303, lines 34–37. **Line 1:** Isaiah 28:29: “Wonderful is His counsel, and great His wisdom.” **4:** Exodus 1:16: “And [the king of Egypt] said: ‘When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, ye shall look upon the birthstool: if it be a son, then ye shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.’”

##### II. The Misogynist in Love

*Minhat Yehuda*, lines 532ff. **Line 2:** Habakkuk: 3:16: “Rottenness entereth into my bones.” **6:** Genesis 19:33.

## III. A Raised Offering

*Minhat Yehuda*, lines 540ff. **Line 2:** Song of Songs 6:4, 10: “You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah”; “Who is she that shines through like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun?” **4:** Leviticus 10:15: “The thigh of heaving and the breast of waving shall they bring with the offerings of the fat made by fire” (NJPS: “elevation offering”).

## IV. Two Things

*Minhat Yehuda*, lines 628ff. **Line 4:** Hosea 12:13.

## V. The Sage Lies

*Minhat Yehuda*, lines 293ff., version 2. **Line 1:** Genesis 23:6.

## YEHUDA ALHARIZI

The Arabic biography was discovered and published by Yosef Sadan in 1996 (*Pe'amim* 68: pp. 16–67). (At various points Ibn Gabirol speaks of himself in terms that have led scholars to say he was “short and ugly”—but that is description by inference; see *Toldot* [1995], p. 267.) In addition to having written the *Tahkemoni* and *Al-Rawda al-Aniqa*, Alharizi is the author of a medical treatise in meter and rhyme; a small body of liturgical poems; four collections of homonymic epigrams; several macaronic poems; a considerable body of poems in Arabic; possibly, an important book containing ethical proverbs, short poems, and unrhymed prose (*Sefer Pineni HaMelitzot*); and—it seems—a series of ten long philosophical-religious poems on the nature of God and existence (*The Divine Qasidas*; see E. Fleischer, “*HaQasidot HaElohiyot*,” *Tarbiz* 66/1 [1997]). The most recent scholarly findings from Russian archives show Alharizi to be a Jewish poet who, while in the East, made a living writing in Arabic and translating from it. Apart from Al-Hariiri’s *Maqaamaat* and his translations of Maimonides, Alharizi translated numerous other scientific and philosophical works from Arabic. In one bizarre case that testifies to the hunger for manuscripts at the time, Alharizi translated part of a work by Maimonides that turned out to have been originally translated from Maimonides’ Arabic into Hebrew by Shmu’el Ibn Tibbon, and then translated back into Arabic by another translator; that Arabic translation then fell into Alharizi’s hands, and he translated it into Hebrew once again! (See the introduction to this volume, final section.) For more on Alharizi, see *The Book of Tahkemoni*, trans. David Segal (Oxford, 2001); *The Tahkemoni*, trans. Victor E. Reichert, 2 vols. (Jerusalem 1965/73); and Yosef Yahalom’s *Mas’ei Yehuda*, ed. Y. Blau and Y. Yahalom (Jerusalem, 2002).

## BORN TO BASENESS

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, #26; *Tahkemoni*, ed. Y. Toporowski (Tel Aviv, 1952). All citations of sources from the *Tahkemoni* are taken from Gate 50 unless otherwise noted. The

translation follows the text of Blau and Yahalom, p. 393. “And I wrote this about a man in Kalneh [al-Raqqah—today’s Syria], whom I praised, though he fled to Harran and hid himself from me.” **Line 3:** “In two languages,” i.e., in poems in both languages, or possibly a macaronic poem employing both Hebrew and Arabic. **5:** So he would reward me for my poem with payment. Song of Songs 3:1–2: “I sought him but found him not.” **7–10:** In other words, he reserves the right to put his name in writing and make his character known. At the same time the poem serves as a warning to future patrons.

#### THE HYPOCRITE

*Mas‘ei Yehuda*, #24; *Tahkemoni*, pp. 292–93. **Heading:** “And I wrote this about a man who sowed contention [Proverbs 6:19], when I saw him praying contritely.” The white clothes suggest that the poem may be about a certain cantor. **Line 2:** Psalms 41:7.

#### THE JERK

*Mas‘ei Yehuda*, #48; *Tahkemoni*, p. 401; *HaShira*, #322:12. **Line 4:** Job 26:7: “He . . . who suspended earth over emptiness.”

#### A MISER IN MOSUL

*Mas‘ei Yehuda*, #167; *Tahkemoni*, p. 429. **Line 1:** The poet was hoping for monetary compensation. **2:** Psalms 5:10. **3:** A vow to reward him. **14:** Song of Songs 1:16. **15–16:** The man justifies his refusal to pay by alluding to Scripture’s commandment in Exodus 21:10 to support a female slave even if her owner marries another woman: “If he marries another, he must not withhold from this one her food [i.e., the slave’s food], her clothing, or her conjugal rights.” The original quotes the line from Scripture exactly; the English lowers the register to preserve the humor. M. Huss states that this is the only Hebrew text in which the suggestion is made—however ironically or humorously—that the obligations of the active partner and the rights of the passive partner in a homosexual relationship are equal to those of husband and wife in the context of heterosexual marriage. That said, in this poem and others by Alharizi, homosexual practice (as opposed to homoerotic pronouncement) is clearly denounced. See Huss, “Mahberet Shal-i’ah HaTzibbur,” p. 221.

#### THE MISER

I.

*Mas‘ei Yehuda*, #19; *Tahkemoni*, p. 391. **Line 2:** Genesis 24:16.

## II.

*Mas'ei Yehuda*, #25; *Tahkemoni*, p. 393. **Line 3:** The pipe here is a word of uncertain meaning, possibly a bagpipe-like instrument made from the bladder of an animal.

## III.

*Mas'ei Yehuda*, #42; *Tahkemoni*, p. 399. The final line draws on a popular image from *Midrash Ma'aseh Torah*, where it is one illustration of a series of impossible conditions.

## ON ZION'S HOLY HILL

*Mas'ei Yehuda*, #114; *Tahkemoni*, p. 417. **Line 1:** The man has been identified as R. Eliyahu HaMa'aravi, who headed one of the Jewish communities in Jerusalem. Alharizi describes him as “a man of charity and good works, though people said he was involved with wicked and ugly acts, and God knows all secrets” (*Mas'ei Yehuda*, p. 56). **2:** Leviticus 13:5–6. **3–4:** In the original the poem puns on the nickname “Rosh HaPe'or” (literally, the head of/peak of Pe'or). The word Pe'or in the place name puns on the word *pa'ar*, “to open widely” or “uncover oneself.” Rosh Pe'or in Scripture (Numbers 23:28) is where Balak made a pagan offering with Balaam, hoping to get him to curse the Israelites. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 64a) states that the shrine of Pe'or was associated with “uncovering” oneself before the idol, with the implication being a defilement of a sexual sort, probably anal. Balaam, of course, is associated with an ass (Numbers 22:22ff.). Y. Ben Na'eh comments on this in “Mishkav Zakhar beHevra HaOthmanit,” *Zion* 66 (2001): 194–95. Huss notes that the condemnation of homosexual acts here and in some of the other poems is all the more startling given the fact that in this same chapter Alharizi presents “classical” homoerotic poems he composed about the beauty of boys (e.g., “Measure for Measure”).

## BOYS: TWO POEMS

## I. If Amram's Son

*Mas'ei Yehuda*, #124; *Tahkemoni*, p. 418. Alharizi often added his own headings to the poems, and this one reads: “One of 'Adina's/composed these scandalous poems/full of terrible things—/and this was among them.” While the heading attributes the poem in the context of the *Tahkemoni*'s narrative to a resident of Baghdad (Adina), rather than to Alharizi—and while there is evidence from other texts to support this claim—some scholars believe that this may simply be a fictional device. This poem is followed by ten replies, the first by the poet and the rest by nine other “men of intelligence, wisdom, integrity, and faith”; each condemns the man, his poem, and all it implies. **Line 1:** Amram's son is Moses. Cf. *Baba Metzi'a* 75b: “Had Moses our Teacher known that there was profit in this thing, he would

not have prohibited it.” While the talmudic text refers to usury, the poet, whether Alharizi or another, diverts the phrase for his own purposes in the poem. **4:** The law referred to is Leviticus 18:22: “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination.”

## II. An Answer

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, #130; *Tahkemoni*, p. 420. The punishment mirrors the active/passive dynamic of the sex.

### MASTERS OF SONG

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, p. 171; *Tahkemoni*, Gate 18, p. 183; *HaShira*, #312, lines 57–60. **Line 1:** Exodus 16:21. **3–4:** Literally, “And at a time when the sons of the East did not find a vision in song, the sons of the West prophesied.” Lamentations 2:29.

### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, #94; *Tahkemoni*, p. 414.

### A LOVER WANDERED

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, #97; *Tahkemoni*, p. 396. **Line 5:** Literally, “in honor of the red-eyed one,” as in Genesis 49:12: “His eyes shall be red with wine”—indicating someone who is always drunk with wine, or in this case, love.

### HOW LONG, MY FAWN

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, #160; *Tahkemoni*, p. 428. **Line 1:** Blau and Yahalom read *matay* (how long) instead of the *Tahkemoni*’s *motee* (my death), and I have followed their reading. **4:** Exodus 22:5: “When a fire is started and spreads to thorns, so that the stacked, standing, or growing corn is consumed, he who started the fire must make restitution.”

### CURSES’ COMPOSITION

#### I.

*Mas’ei Yehuda*, #27; *Tahkemoni*, pp. 393–94; *HaShira*, #312, lines 357–61. **Heading:** “And this I wrote of a man/who in Kalneh was the basest of oxen;/he was always making poems/that really were broken cisterns,/the waters of which were poison [bitter].” The man’s name was, it seems, Berakhot (Barakat, in Arabic), which means “Blessings.” Alharizi turns the name inside out, in keeping with the man’s character. **Line 6:** Leviticus 19:20. **8:** Genesis 30:23.

## II.

*Mas'ei Yehuda*, #28; *Tahkemoni*, p. 394. **Heading:** “And from him I borrowed a book—/his epigrams, not worth the look,/and as soon as he'd sent it on,/he came and took it home,/and I wrote this.” Proverbs 26:11.

## A FLASHING SWORD

*Mas'ei Yehuda*, #105; *Tahkemoni*, p. 414. **Lines 1–4:** Proverbs 12:18; Isaiah 5:24: “As the tongue of fire devoureth the stubble, and as the chaff is consumed in the flame . . .”

## PALINDROME FOR A PATRON; OR, CAUTION: THIS DOOR SWINGS BOTH WAYS

*Tahkemoni*, p. 93. The rhymed prose leading up to this poem (i.e., the *maqama's* narrative) can also be read in reverse. The prose lines immediately preceding the poem weave in the loaded line from Deuteronomy 11:26: “Lo, I set before you this day the blessing and the curse.”

## A POEM NO PATRON HAS EVER HEARD: WITH THE LETTER R IN EVERY WORD

*Tahkemoni*, p. 119. As with the preceding poem (the palindrome), the rhymed prose leading up to this metered poem duplicates the feat and contains the letter *r* in every word.

ADMIRATION FOR THE PATRON AGAIN I'LL PROVE,  
AND THE LETTER R I'LL NOW REMOVE

*Tahkemoni*, p. 121. Again, the rhymed prose before the poem reproduces the constraint.

## TWO POEMS ON KARAISM

*Tahkemoni*, p. 175. These are the first two poems (in reverse order here) of a series in which the believer (*hama'amin*) debates the sectarian Karaite (*hamin*). Karaism was a serious threat to medieval Judaism at one point, and recent scholarship has proposed that its aggressive presence in Sa'adia Gaon's day may have spurred the development of biblical Hebrew along scientific lines and so, indirectly, the new Hebrew poetry in Spain. By Alharizi's time, the movement had waned in the East. The poet's own position vis-à-vis the group was tolerant (and influenced by Maimonides). He refers to members of the sect, however, as *minim*, heretics, or schismatics. See Segal, *The Book of Tahkemoni*, pp. 507–10; J. Rosenthal, “Karaites and Karaism in Western Europe” [Hebrew], *Mehqarim uMeqorot* 8 (1967): 238–44; and Lasker, “Karaism in Twelfth-Century Spain,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1–2 (1992): 179–95.

## VIRTUE

*Tahkemoni*, p. 197. In Gate 19 seven poets debate which virtue is most prized by God. This is the first and, I believe, most interesting poem in that series, though Alharizi suggests that the final value, good-heartedness, is in fact most highly prized in the eyes of God, as it contains all the other values in it.

I'LL SET OUT A VERSE, AND LAY THE FOUNDATION; THEN YOU'LL  
ADD ONE FOR THE STANZA'S COMPLETION

*Tahkemoni*, Gate 32, pp. 264, 268–70. These five poems are the product of a verse competition between a young man and one of the *Tahkemoni*'s main characters, Hever the Kenite. The narrator of the story says he witnessed the competition in his youth. While attending a gathering of intellectuals who were discussing poetry and other abstruse matters, an older man entered and boasted of his own poetic prowess. A young man in the crowd challenged him to a competition. The young man would first recite lines in rhymed prose, and then the old man would complete the thought, maintaining the rhyme. Then each would follow with a metrical poem on the same topic. The excerpts here are taken from twenty-one examples they produced. In each case the old man betters the younger by raising the additional verse to another level of complication or irony, and often by exploiting linguistic elements introduced by the former. In the process he implicitly puts the youth in his place.

## IV.

The pomegranate is veiled by its branches and leaves.

## YA'AQOV BEN ELAZAR

On the link to European sources, see Schirmann, *Toldot* (1997), pp. 233–40, and R. Scheindlin, "Sippurei Ha'ahava shel Ya'aqov ben Elazar: Ben Sifrut 'Aravit leSifrut Romans," *The Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, division C, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1994). Schirmann and Scheindlin come down strongly on the side of at least *some* European influence, most likely one of the early romances. The link between the thirteenth-century anti-Maimunists and their beards is made by E. Horovitz in an article in *Pe'amim* 59 (1994): 124 ff.

## THE HYPOCRITE'S BEARD

*Sipurei Ahava shel Ya'aqov Ben Elazar*, ed. Y. David (Tel Aviv, 1992/93), part 8, line 317. This poem is drawn from a chapter in which 'Akhbor, an eighty-year-old hypocrite with a long beard comes to town and wins the hearts of the wicked townspeople

by posing as a righteous man and delivering a fiery sermon on evil—in particular the sins of greed and extortion. He implores his listeners to repent, in the process telling them tales about hard-hearted people who did not give to the needy. The crowd is won over and donations gathered for the preacher. Lemu’el, the narrator—who has chosen to wander in the world so as to come to know it as it really is, for better and for worse—smells a rat, follows ‘Akhbor home, and discovers that he lives in a palace where he is waited on by four beautiful women who serve him a lavish meal, then play and sing wine-songs in the Andalusian tradition for him. After reciting some poems of his own about his desire, ‘Akhbor dismisses them, calls out in a whisper, and a black woman comes into the room. The two are about to make love when the narrator, who can no longer tolerate what he’s seeing (the woman’s race, it seems, is the final straw), throws himself at the would-be lovers and strips them bare. After a brief argument with ‘Akhbor, Lemu’el lets out a shout, the (white) servant girls enter, and Lemu’el tells them what their master has been up to. The girls recite poems—including the one presented here—that mock their master and in particular his beard; then they attack him viciously, pulling at the beard and beating the old man to death. Finally they toss his body into a pit.

**Lines 1–4:** Literally, “‘Akhbor’s beard, like a foolish shepherd’s, has branches extending in every direction.” Zechariah 11:15: “the gear of a foolish shepherd.” I have translated freely here to account for the poem’s removal from the narrative, where it is clear what ‘Akhbor represents. (His name is biblical [Genesis 38:38, 2 Kings 22:14, and elsewhere] but may also carry the overtones of *‘akhbar*, a mouse or rat.) The primary dictionary definition of “cant,” it should be recalled, is “the hypocritical expression of pious sentiments; insincere religious or moralistic talk.” In addition to the common usage—“words used to stock effect”—it is also “the secret jargon of thieves, gypsies, etc.” The image of the branching beard appears to have been drawn from Ezekiel 31, where a positive depiction of the branches with animals among them (31:5–6) is reversed when punishment is rendered (31:10–15). There too everything in the branches of the fallen tree makes its way to the netherworld. In another beard poem, Ben Elazar writes that Akhbor’s beard runs from his cheek to his rectum. Also Ezekiel 24:12. **8:** The Hebrew has “what seemed like a bird”; I have brought over the image of the night from line 11, where the word from Isaiah can mean both arrow-snake and a kind of night bird, possibly an owl. **10:** Song of Songs 2:15. **11:** Isaiah 34:15. **14:** Isaiah 32:17. **15:** Micah 4:4. Literally, “Each man beneath his fig tree, in the shadow of ‘Akhbor’s beard.”

#### FOUR POEMS ON SUBTLE LOVE

The “subtle love” here has often been referred to as spiritual love, though it should be pointed out that, at least in poems 2–4, the refinement of passion through sublimation is clearly a stage along the path to physical consummation. In *Sefer HaMeshalim*, poems 2–4 appear as part of the narrative of the love story of Sahar and Kima. I have grouped them together in keeping with the outline of that story, adding the short poem from the amatory allegory of book 1 at the start.

### I. The Doe

*Sipurei Ahava*, part 1, line 47. In this scene the intellect, personified as a general, addresses its own eye, instructing it to gaze at the doe (i.e., the soul), whom he seeks in love. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, intellect is presented in similar terms (see Rosen, *Unveiling Eve*, pp. 95ff., for a full discussion, and *Phaedrus*, lines 250ff.). The conventions of the classical Andalusian erotic poem are jostled and blurred here. While the poem is presented as an erotic poem in that classical tradition, with the doe as the object of desire, the lover from the outset accepts separation from the beloved, as part of the new code of "spiritual love"; at the same time, the soul's desire to reciprocate by praising the intellect (line 4) subverts the conventional poetics of classical Andalusian secular love poetry (which call for the refusal of the lover's advances). That said, the poem does preserve the poetics of the erotic Andalusian epithalamia, which are also at work in the entire sequence: consummation of at least one sort is hinted at, though not depicted, when at the end of the complicated allegory of book 1, the poet's soul convinces him to escort her to the Garden of Delight, where they will encounter the General of Love—the intellect—with his mistress Wisdom, and—she imagines—make love to her. **Line 4:** Literally, "She [the object of the desire] will praise you every day." Psalms 119:175: "Let my soul live and it shall praise thee." **8:** I.e., writing this poem.

### II. A Kiss

*Sipurei Ahava*, part 9, line 299. **Line 1:** The Hebrew speaks of the *malakh yedidim*—literally, the angel (or envoy) of friends (or lovers), i.e., her own hand, which the noble lady would, after elaborate and agonizing trials of courtship, kiss in his presence—"her eyes dancing and smiling, as though they embraced"—as a symbolic gesture to her suitor. Because the courtly convention calls for restraint (and because others are present—the "spies" of the literary convention), this distant, symbolic gesture is all she can offer her frustrated suitor—for now. (Kissing the back of one's own hand may also have been a traditional gesture of respect. See Elitzur, *Shirat HaHol*, 2:111–13) In this poem, the woman tells of an incident that reveals the man's impatience with this waiting game. **4:** Literally, "Is this the Law of the Gentle [or refined]?"

### III. A Lover's Transgression

*Sipurei Ahava*, part 9, line 365. This poem is in response to Sahar's continued impatience and complaint that the fire within him has made him thirsty. He asks her to "please tilt your pitcher, so I can drink. . . ." **Line 3:** The word for "his jail" (*sohoro*) puns on the name Sahar. **6:** Literally, "that it [my heart] can't hear."

### IV. Spats and Squabbles

*Sipurei Ahava*, part 9, line 393. This poem is spoken by the man. The happy end of this chapter has the two married, but Sahar applies the lesson he has learned in order to keep the tension in the marriage alive.

## AVRAHAM IBN HASDAI

## WATCH OUT

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Tel Aviv, 1950), chapter 5, p. 44. This and the following two poems are recited by rivals of the king's assistant. In an attempt to undermine the king's confidence in him, they come before the king and accuse the assistant of lying and insubordination.

## PROPORTION

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 5, p. 50. Advice given to the king's assistant or second in command, in the wake of the rivals' attack, when he has fallen into disfavor with the king.

## AGE AS AUTHOR

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 6, p. 64; *HaShira*, #327, lines 126–29. This is part of the prince's reflections after his expedition.

## WHICH IS MORE BITTER

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 11, p. 91.

## THE LYING WORD

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 5, pp. 43–44.

## THE MONK'S ADVICE

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 12, p. 96.

## ADVICE FOR A FUTURE KING

I. *Wisdom's Mantle*

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 27, p. 179.

II. *Don't Believe*

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 30, p. 193.

III. *The Hyssop and the Cedar*

*Ben HaMelekh veHaNazir*, chapter 30, p. 188; *HaShira*, #332:3. 1 Kings 15:13.

## MEIR HALEVI ABULAFIA

## PLEA FOR A TAX BREAK

*Yedi'ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha'Ivrit 2*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1936), p. 36. The Arabic heading is corrupt. Haim Brody, the editor of Abulafia's poems, provides what appears to be a composite rendition drawn from various sources: "And he addressed the vizier Abu 'Amar ben Shushan, at the behest of R. Avraham Ha-Yarhi, may his soul rest in Eden, seeking [tax] shelter, which he did not receive from him." **Line 2:** Lamentations 1:13. **4:** Jonah 1:13.

## (L)ATTITUDE

*Yedi'ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha'Ivrit 2*, p. 22. **Line 1:** Psalms 33:11. **2:** Zephaniah 3:5; Psalms 17:2.

## FIGHTING TIME

*Yedi'ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha'Ivrit 2*, p. 23; *HaShira*, #336. **Line 3:** Genesis 37:14. **5–6:** That is, only the best and brightest (the largest) of the heavenly hosts, the sun and the moon, must on occasion suffer eclipse, just as the best of creation—man, and among them the best of men—must contend against Time or Fate and sometimes fail. Isaiah 50:3. A note following the poem in manuscript indicates that this is a translation of a poem by the emir of Seville, al-Mu'atamid.

## YITZHAQ HASNIRI

## ON THE WORSHIP OF WOOD AND A FOOL

*Piyyutei R. Yitzhaq HaSniri*, ed. B. Bar-Tiqvah (Ramat Gan, 1996), #48. An *ofan*, for the second day of Passover, in the form of a *muwashshah*. Acrostic *Sniri*. **Line 1:** Qedar, one of Ishmael's sons (Genesis 25:13), is a standard epithet for Islam; "fool" refers to Muhammad (see Yitzhaq Ibn Ezra's "Conversion," above). This sort of disparagement was by no means uncommon, even in this culture of coexistence. Some Muslims, for instance, referred to Jews as "apes" or "monkeys." **3–6:** Edom is a standard epithet for Christianity. The Hebrew actually employs another epithet, *'utz* (Genesis 36:28: "The children of Dishan—'Utz and Aran"; Lamentations 4:21), which involves a play on the word for "wood" (*'etz*), implying that the pagan worship of wood is etymologically embedded in the history and ancestry of that religion. Isaiah 40:19–20: "To whom then will ye liken God? . . . The image perchance, which the craftsman hath melted, and the goldsmith spread over with gold? . . . A holm-oak is set apart; He chooseth a tree that will not rot. He seeketh unto him a cunning craftsman, to set up an image, that

shall not be moved.” 7: Jeremiah 22:14. 9: Isaiah 41:7: “So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith. . . . And he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.” 19: Jeshurun is a standard epithet for Israel. 22: “They” refers to the heavenly hosts of angels and links the *piyyut* to the liturgy. (See “ofan,” in the glossary.)

#### MESHULLAM DEPIERA

For more on Meshullam’s work and the complex nature of his longer poems especially, see Brann, *Compunctious Poet*, pp. 141–43, and James H. Lehman, “Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy,” *Prooftexts* 1, 2 (1981): 133–51; also articles by Fleischer and Septimus (in the notes below to Moshe Ben Nahman). Fleischer (*Toldot* [1997], p. 321) observes that Meshullam managed his quiet (and almost entirely personal) revolution while maintaining all the outward trappings of Andalusian verse (its meters, rhyme scheme, and form). In the social context of Meshullam’s day, he adds, neither the qabbalists nor the participants in the Maimonidean controversy found any great need for poetry, and Meshullam’s innovations were never really developed—though he was looked up to by some of the later poets, especially in Shelomo Depiera’s circle. Lehman proposes that the town of Piera might be in Burgundy rather than Catalonia.

#### THE POET

*Yedi’ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha’Ivrit* 4, ed. H. Brody (Berlin/Jerusalem, 1938), p. 92; *HaShira*, #344. This poem treats the notion that *meitav hashir kezavo* “the truest poetry is the most feigning,” a maxim that the Hebrew poets adopted from Arabic, though James Lehman proposes that the language of the poem takes it well beyond the conventional approach. The Hebrew *ani hu . . . ani hu* (“It is I . . . I am”—as in *Numbers Rabbah* 10:5, and in the poem) is, says Lehman, “a rabbinic catch phrase for the constancy of God. . . . The poet, too, is a creator, but an inconstant and deliberately fickle one.” Cf. HaNagid’s epigram on the same theme, “He’ll Bring You Trouble,” above, and the notes to that poem.

#### ON A NEW BOOK BY MAIMONIDES

*Yedi’ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha’Ivrit* 4, p. 39. One of several, mostly long, poems by the poet concerning Maimonides; some 20 percent of Meshullam’s extant output treats the controversy surrounding his philosophy. His critique here is directed at Ben Maimon’s most famous book, *Guide for the Perplexed*, or *Guide of the Perplexed*, which applies Aristotelian philosophy to the understanding of Scripture and key Jewish concepts, including prophecy, sacrifice, and the

resurrection of the dead. Maimonides called for an allegorical or figurative interpretation of Scripture and its miracles, and likened prophecy to dreaming. See, for example, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. and ed. S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), 3:50, 2:36–48. Some scholars feel that Meshullam softened his critique in the wake of Nahmanides' famous letter to the French rabbis, calling for a reconciliation; James Lehman (above) sees all of Meshullam's "conciliatory" gestures as being part of a satirical polemic against the rationalists. His loyalty to the qabbalists, says Lehman, never wavered. **Line 1:** The *shibbutz* here is compound, alluding to the assertion in *Sefer Yetzira*, "*blom pikha*," "bridle [or block] your mouth [from speaking]"—meaning that one should refrain from commenting on sacred mysteries—and also to Psalms 32:9: "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with the bit and bridle, that they come not near you." **2:** Literally, "These are things we have not heard before"—which expresses astonishment and skepticism, but might also indicate that they have no precedent in Scripture and therefore are lacking in authority, invalid, or worse. **4:** Jeremiah 23:28: "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; but he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (*Guide of the Perplexed*, pp. 370ff.).

#### BEFORE YOU TAKE UP YOUR PEN

*Yedi'ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha'Ivrit 4*, p. 39, #16, lines 9–10. These lines are taken from a much longer poem addressed to a friend who has given vent to his anger. The poet cautions him about putting such sentiments into circulation, as they can't be taken back. Isaiah 16:3; Genesis 22:6; Proverbs 30:14: "This is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their great teeth as knives."

#### HOW COULD YOU PRESS FOR SONG

*Yedi'ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha'Ivrit 4*, #16, lines 32–end. This excerpt is drawn from the same poem as "Before You Take Up Your Pen" and comprises the second part of the *qasida*. The first half of the *qasida* takes his friend to task for having given vent to his anger; the second part addresses his friend's request for poems and defends his own (apparently new or recently developed) inclination to mystical religious study rather than poetry. This is one of the first of the Spanish-Hebrew poems to come out explicitly against secular learning involving the Hebrew language, and as such, it is of considerable importance. Study of Hebrew grammar was an essential part of the Andalusian cultural revolution brought about in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the emergence of the great poetry of the period is unthinkable without it. (See for example, Ibn Gabirol's hymn to the language in *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, p. 49, and in the original Hebrew, *SH*, #226.) Here, for the first time, we find a poet not only avoiding such study, but mocking it and its heroes outright. Fleischer comments that this

attitude is a product of the poet's worldview and that of his circle, and that it testifies to the collapse of the traditional Andalusian-Hebrew value system (*Toldot* [1997], p. 296). **Line 1:** His friend is pressing him to write and send on new poems. **8:** The poet alludes specifically to the "order" of the Mishna known as *Ohalot* (Tents—as in Numbers 19:14: "Whoever dies in a tent"), which deals with the laws of purity and contact with corpses; I have generalized the allusion to refer to the Mishna generally. **9:** I.e., the tractate known as *Berakhot* (Blessings), chapter 5, which begins with the line the poet alludes to: "One may stand to pray only in a solemn frame of mind." **10:** I.e., *Baba Batra*, chapter 8, which treats the laws of ownership, property, and inheritance. **11–12:** *Sefer Yetzira* 1:2, which understands the mysteries of the cosmos through the mystical interpretation of language and, more precisely, Hebrew letters. The seven Hebrew letters which can be doubled are *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *peh*, *resh*, and *tav*. At one time in Hebrew all could express two different sounds, depending on whether or not they were doubled (see line 23). **15:** In Hebrew, as in Arabic, the verb is normally based on a three-letter root, though sometimes four-letter roots occur as well. **16:** The expanses of circles, that is, their area. In other words, is grammar practical, like geometry? **23:** Hard and soft refer to certain Hebrew letters whose sound can be altered by the addition of a dot to the center of the letter, yielding, for example, either *v* or *b*, *f* or *p*, etc. **25:** Qimhi is David Qimhi (c. 1160–1235), known as Radaq, who wrote an important grammatical work and biblical dictionary, as well as a commentary that was printed in all subsequent major editions of the rabbinic Bible. He was firmly on Maimonides' side of the argument over scriptural interpretation. **26:** "The wise one of Fez" is Yehuda Hayyuj (c. 945–1000), one of the most important Hebrew grammarians. Born in Fez, he came to Cordoba in 960 and entered the fray in the violent grammar wars between Menahem Ibn Saruq and Dunash (see introduction). He is responsible for the major "discovery" of the three-letter root of the Hebrew verb, and all subsequent work on Hebrew language has been based on his ideas. **28:** "The winged one" is Yonah Ibn Janaah (whose name means "son of the wing" in Arabic), a Spanish-Hebrew grammarian and lexicographer from the first half of the eleventh century. His most important works are *Sefer HaRiqma* and *Sefer HaShorashim* (translated from Arabic by Yehuda Ibn Tibbon), a wide-ranging book on Hebrew grammar and a complete dictionary of biblical Hebrew, respectively. **29:** "Dots and lines," i.e., the Hebrew vowels beneath, above, and within the letters. **32:** Whether the word should have a masculine or feminine grammatical marker. **34:** Hebrew, like Arabic, has verbs that are classified as "full" or "hollow," "weak" or "strong," depending on which letters comprise the root. **35–36:** The poet concludes that he isn't interested in the dry study of grammar; he is concerned only with religious study and, it seems, his own immortality as a poet (based on previous work) or the sense of the eternal that study and engagement with the mysteries of creation and existence yield. The contradiction between his having stated at the start that he isn't interested in poetry and his having written a long poem to

explain why (in which he also singles out the religious value of song) is also found in the work of other poets. (Ibn Gabirol, for instance, writes a poem about not being able to write poems, as do Todros Abulafia and Vidal Benvisite.)

#### AS ONE WITH THE MORNING STARS

*Yedi'ot HaMakhon leHeqer HaShira Ha'Ivrit* 4, p. 105, #45, lines 1–13; *HaShira*, #342. This is the opening (prelude) to a long poem to “Avraham HaNasi,” who is most likely Avraham Ibn Hasdai, author of *The Prince and the Monk* (above). The repetition Meshullam employs here (e.g., lines 1–2, 14–15, 15–16) is characteristic, and he makes use of a variety of such repetitive strategies to strengthen the sense of linkage and unity in the poem, even as his ideas tend to strike out in seemingly contradictory directions. **Line 1:** Job 38:7: “When the morning stars sang together . . .” **6:** Others understand *yetzuray* (Job 17:7) as “feelings” instead of “limbs.” **13:** Or: “And I broke out in song and began to strum.” **18:** The poet takes the lack of reply from the surrounding world, including his own instruments, as a sign (see lines 23–26) that the people around him are not capable of hearing what he has to say in song and so it is pointless to continue singing or composing poems. The continuation of the poem explicitly castigates the “lowly generation” into which the poet and his friends, including Ibn Hasdai, were born. He then goes on to mention specific friends who are in fact worthy, and praises them all.

#### MOSHE BEN NAHMAN (NAHMANIDES)

The combination of French heresy and papal pressure for increased restrictions on Jews led the Church to focus on Spain. The Dominican and Franciscan orders were founded to combat “religious nonconformity,” and “the special mechanism of inquiry known as the Inquisition was established . . . [introducing] a new weapon, the so-called ‘dialogue of controversy’” (Gerber, *The Jews of Spain*, p. 102). The Disputation at Barcelona was one of those “dialogues.”

While Ben Nahman himself expressed a pronounced reluctance with regard to the inclusion of liturgical poetry in the worship service (“who adds to the hymns and songs acts improperly” [*Hidushim, Berakhot* 59a]), all but one of his extant poems are explicitly religious or liturgical; and religion, along with a powerful desire for individual salvation in the face of persecution, pervades even the one nonliturgical poem in his canon, “Me’a Batim” (One Hundred Verses). For more on Ben Nahman’s poetry and influence, see E. Fleischer, “The Gerona School of Poetry,” and B. Septimus, “‘Open Rebuke and Concealed Love’: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition”—both in *R. Moses Nahmanides: Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge/London, 1983). The quote from his letter can be found in Chavel’s edition of Nahmanides’ work (see citation below), p. 368. DePiera had seen the Mongols as

heralds of the messianic age. The Mongols were in Jerusalem itself for only three months, in 1260, but they caused considerable damage. See also M. H. Burgoyne, *Mamluk Jerusalem*, London, (1987), p. 58.

BEFORE THE WORLD EVER WAS

*Kitvei Rabbeinu Moshe Ben Nahman*, ed. H. Chavel, (Jerusalem, 1963), 1: 392; *HaShira*, #352. A *seliha* (*mustajaab*). Acrostic: *Moshe Ben Nahman Yerondi Hazaq*. This *piyyut* treats the Day of Judgment and the soul's descent from on high to be reunited with the body. Schirmann notes that, at least at first glance, it contains the first true mixture of qabbalistic elements and the world of Andalusian poetry. He adds that while qabbalistic elements generally had a negative influence on the quality of medieval Hebrew verse, in this case the poem embodies the mystical elements quite naturally. Septimus also reads the poem in a qabbalistic light, noting that "the magnificent opening stanzas . . . in which the soul makes its descent through the world of the *sefirot*, . . . constitute a kind of qabbalistic *tiqqun* of the traditional Andalusian genre [of soul-poems having a tripartite structure and progression: the soul's origin in the upper world; its earthly exile; and ultimate reunion with its heavenly source]. . . . This 'return of all things to their original state' finally establishes the spiritual and literary symmetry required by Andalusian sensibility—but it establishes it on qabbalistic terms, as all things are in the end reabsorbed into the realm of the *sefirot*" ("Open Rebuke," pp. 28–29). Gershom Scholem translated the poem into German. (See Scholem in *Schocken Almanach* 5696 [Berlin, 1935/36], pp. 86ff.). Fleischer argues that previous scholars have read the poem incorrectly, and that in fact its imagery is purely Neoplatonic and not qabbalistic at all. For more on the Gerona qabbalists, see Scholem's *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Philadelphia and Princeton, 1987), pp. 365ff.

**Lines 1–4:** The poem is preceded by the scriptural verse: "I say, My work is concerning a king"—or, in the NJPS version, "I speak my poem to a king" (Psalms 45:2), which is then sung as a refrain after each stanza. All subsequent quatrains of the poem end with the word "king." Proverbs 8:23; Daniel 11:3; Job 28:12; Nehemiah 13:6: "In the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went unto the king, and after certain days asked I leave of the king." **5–8:** Esther 3:9: "to bring it into the king's treasuries." **10:** Zechariah 4:3. Some commentators suggest that the image of left and right involves an allusion to qabbalistic concepts. **12:** Nehemiah 3:15: "and the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king's garden." This is sometimes understood to refer to Siloam's pool in Jerusalem, or simply an "irrigation pool." **13–16:** Psalms 139:15; Jeremiah 14:8; Nehemiah 2:6: "For the king said unto me . . . 'For how long shalt thy journey be? And when wilt thou return?'" **17–20:** Psalms 119:105; Proverbs 20:37; Job 30:15; Proverbs 24:21: "My son, fear thou the Lord and the King." **21–24:** Proverbs 16:11; Job 37:13; Psalms 44:14; 2 Samuel 3:37: "It was not by the king's will that Abner son of Ner was killed." **25–28:** Ezekiel 26:16; Psalms 32:5; Job 30:23, 16:8; Nehemiah 2:9: "I gave them the

king's letters"—i.e., what the king has recorded. **29–32:** Hosea 13:5; Genesis 42:34; Numbers 11:34; Jeremiah 31:19; Ecclesiastes 8:2: "I counsel thee: Keep the king's command." **33–36:** I'll be judged for secret sins. Ecclesiastes 3:11, 12:14; Psalms 90:8; Daniel 1:10: "I fear my Lord the king." **37–40:** The subject is the now-penitent "heart" of line 33. Isaiah 66:2; Job 20:21; Proverbs 25:5: "Take away the wicked from before the king." **41–44:** *Sheqalim* 1:6–7; *Avot* 4:22: "Despite your wishes are you going to give a full accounting before the king of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He." **45–48:** Psalms 62:13; Daniel 9:7; Psalms 130:4; Nehemiah 5:4: "money for the king's tribute." **49–52:** Psalms 71:6; 89:3; Isaiah 65:24; Ezra 8:22: "For I was ashamed to ask of the king." **53–56:** Literally, "the body in its prison" (i.e., the ground), as in Psalms 142:8. Micah 7:19; Psalms 57:2, 31:2; Proverbs 30:28: "Yet is she in the king's palace." **57–60:** "She" refers to the soul. Job 9:31; 1 Kings 3:28: "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged." **61–64:** Genesis 49:24; *Berakhot* 13a; Esther 2:9; 1:8; Nehemiah 2:8: "Asaph the keeper of the King's park."

FROM "ONE HUNDRED VERSES"

*Kitvei Ben Nahman*, p. 398. This hymn to old age is Nahmanides' only extant "secular" (nonliturgical) poem; it is also the only poem of his written in quantitative meter and monorhyme. In classical Andalusian verse old age is almost always cast in a negative light, while youth is celebrated. As such the thrust of the poem is consistent with the emphases of the Gerona school's counterpoetics, wherein the Andalusian aesthetic, or ethos, is challenged directly. For this excerpt from what would be a two-hundred-line English poem, I have woven together passages from three separate parts of the poem, emphasizing the rewards of age (i.e., truth, closeness to the divine) and the vision of the resurrection (rather than the more predictable, if elegant, elegy for lost youth). All this is described with tremendous passion. The metaphysical nature of the poem notwithstanding, it is couched in an utterly personal, intimate tone. The addressee is R. Yonah Gerondi, the poet's teacher and cousin. **Lines 1–4:** Hosea 8:2; Isaiah 24:14; Nehemiah 13:6; Job 38:12; Isaiah 47:11. **5–8:** Hosea 13:15; Esther 8:16. **9:** My reading follows Brody, who has *te'erav* (please) for *tir'av* (starve); cf. Proverbs 13:19: "The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul." **11:** The translation skips the next twenty-one lines of the Hebrew (lines 6–26, doubled in English), which continue the friends' elegy for the golden days of youth and all its pleasures, including wine, women, war, wealth, and the like. The translation picks up at the poet's reply, line 27 in the Hebrew, and continues through line 31 of the Hebrew, with the poet justifying the ways of God. **11–14:** Amos 6:13; Ecclesiastes 1:17; Proverbs 27:9; Isaiah 53:3. "A destiny" is literally "days have sought [against] and fallen [upon us]," as in Genesis 43:18. **15–18:** Nehemiah 13:31; Isaiah 28:17; Psalms 112:5; Song of Songs 6:5. **19–20:** I.e., time dressed you up and made you look good, for a while. Psalms 90:10: "Yet is their pride but travail and vanity"; 2 Kings 9:30: "And Jezebel painted her eyes"; Ezekiel 23:40: "for them you painted your eyes and put on your finery" (NJPS). **21:** The translation then skips Hebrew

lines 32–55, which extend the description of youth as vanity, and drive home the point that only a fool could think one might hold on to its delights. The English resumes at lines 56–60, with the poet about to begin his praise of old age. **22–24:** Proverbs 4:19; Psalms 80:17, 37:20. **26–30:** Psalms 24:4, 69:22, 102:10. **31:** Lines 61–69 of the Hebrew, omitted here, extend the description of “those who go in fear of sin” and their service of God. The translation resumes at line 70 of the Hebrew and then continues without interruption to the poem’s conclusion. Cf. *Hagigah* 13a, which implies that one should be fifty years old before taking up the mystical study of the Chariot, or the secrets and mysteries of the divine world, the Qabbala. Proverbs 18:12. **34:** Ezekiel 10:12; Exodus 3:2. **36:** Song of Songs 2:4. **38:** Habakkuk 3:4. **39–40:** Jeremiah 31:12. **44:** Job 40:22. **48–50:** Psalms 25:13; Isaiah 66:11; Ezekiel 28:16; 1 Samuel 25:29; Exodus 28:2; Psalms 50:2. **51–52:** Isaiah 2:19; *Ketubot* 111a: “to roll through the cavities”—the dead beyond the borders of Israel must “roll” through underground cavities that will be opened up so that the righteous may reach Israel before they can be brought back to life. **56:** Proverbs 3:35. **58–60:** Jeremiah 12:1; Psalms 17:5. **61:** Psalms 103:21. **63–66:** This seems to be alluding to a specific historical occurrence, but the allusion has remained obscure and may simply be general. Hosea 9:13; Micah 6:7; Psalms 127:3; Jeremiah 16:6. **69:** The line, based on Ezekiel 16:6, can also be translated: “Despite our blood, we live” (NJPS). **71:** Psalms 17:14. **73–74:** Psalms 17:15; *Sukkah* 45b. **75–76:** Isaiah 45:8; Job 2:3. **77–80:** Psalms 103:5; Job 33:25: “His flesh is tenderer than a child’s; He returneth to the days of his youth”—i.e., he regains the strength and health of youth; Isaiah 26:19; Psalms 8:6, 145:5. They did not seek glory and splendor in their prayers, so much as righteousness and guidance. That is, they worshiped in purity, not for reward. **81–84:** Proverbs 16:15; Isaiah 24:23, 25:8. **85–90:** Proverbs 16:15; Jeremiah 51:56; Deuteronomy 32:35; Isaiah 59:18, 34:4; Psalms 104:30. **91–92:** Isaiah 26:4; Jeremiah 4:24.

#### SHEM TOV IBN FALAQERA

See also *Falaqera’s Book of the Seeker*, trans. and ed. M. Herschel Levine (New York, 1976). The epigram in the biographical note is from *Sefer HaMevaresh* (below), p. 8. The characterization of the work as “a ritual exorcism or catharsis through which Falaqera hopes to purge his heart and mind of poetry” is Brann’s (*Compunctious Poet*, p. 136). Falaqera valued the poetry of the Bible highly, but distinguished between the various degrees of poetry; the postbiblical, or Spanish, poets represent the lowest degree of achievement in his scheme. See also Adele Berlin, *Biblical Poetry through Medieval Eyes* [Bloomington, 1991], p. 97.

#### CAREER COUNSELING

*Sefer HaMevaresh* [no editor listed] (Warsaw, 1924), p. 41; *HaShira*, #354, lines 37–38. Doctors were an easy target in the ancient world and the Middle Ages,

and poems about their malpractice are common (see Ibn Zabara's "The Physician," above). In other places, Falaqera and the other poets treat the profession respectfully, and it should be noted that it was a common occupation for Jews.

#### A MYSTERY

*Sefer HaMevaresh*, p. 53. Ecclesiastes 11:5: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child."

#### ON POETS AND POETRY

*Sefer HaMevaresh*, p. 79; *HaShira*, #356, lines 89–90. This poem comes toward the end of part 1 of *The Book of the Seeker*, which marks the formal renunciation of Falaqera's life as a composer of verse. The didactic material of part 2 of the book is entirely in prose. Tova Rosen writes that, after meeting with a poet, the seeker is "filled with disgust at the profession." Looking elsewhere in his work she notes the equivalence Falaqera implicitly draws between poetry and women with their seductive, and dangerous, charms. "This juncture between the hatred of women and the assault on poetry," she says, "is typical of the thirteenth century, the Aristotelian Century, not only in Jewish culture, but in Islam and in Christian Europe as well." At the heart of this juncture are Maimonides' (negative) views on poetry (*Unveiling Eve*, pp. 75–82). See also Fleischer's observations in *Toldot* [1997], p. 282, n. 15.

#### WHY GOD MADE YOU

*Sefer HaMevaresh*, p. 55. See *Choice of Pearls*, "On Patience," #147. Santob De Carrión casts the same notion in verse in his *Moral Proverbs*. For an adaptation of those proverbs, see my *Hymns & Qualms* (Riverdale-on-Hudson, 1998), pp. 92–105.

#### THE FOOL THINKS

*Iggeret HaMusar* [The Book of Ethics], ed. A. M. Habermann, *Qovetz 'al-Yad*, n.s., 1 (1936): 57.

**Line 4:** Proverbs 18:14.

#### POVERTY'S WAR

*Iggeret HaMusar*, p. 67; *Sefer HaMevaresh*, p. 17.

## YITZHAQ IBN SAHULA

The reader of *Meshal HaQadmoni* may wonder why its otherwise qabbalistically inclined author chose to leave all traces of mysticism out of his work (though this is the first work in which *The Zohar* is mentioned). Raphael Loewe suggests that he did so for several reasons: (1) the work was intended for ordinary, not esoteric, readers; (2) Maimonides (who appears in the book in thinly disguised form) is the model of the ideal man for the author and his readers, and he came down—famously—on the nonmystical (i.e., rationalist) side of the medieval debate over faith; and (3) the denunciation of astrology in the work might have seemed to Ibn Sahula somehow at odds with a presentation of mystical doctrine. (See Ibn Sahula, *Meshal HaQadmoni: Fables from the Distant Past*, ed. and trans. Raphael Loewe (Oxford, 2004), pp. xxiii–xxiv.) The other curious detail of the qabbalistic matrix behind the book is that *The Zohar*'s principal author, Moshe de Leon, at one point identifies himself as the author of a work that is also called *Meshal HaQadmoni*. While it seems odd that two books, by two friends, would emerge from the same part of Spain with precisely the same title at roughly the same time, scholars have been unable to identify the book de Leon referred to, and the mystery of the “other” *Meshal HaQadmoni* remains unsolved.

## THE CYNIC SPEAKS

*Meshal HaQadmoni*, ed. Y. Zemora (Tel Aviv, 1952), vol. 1, chapter 4, pp. 22–23. **Line 7–8:** Ecclesiastes 2:10; Psalms 46:1. **11–12:** Isaiah 22:18.

## ON HUMILITY

*Meshal HaQadmoni*, vol. 4, chapter 60, p. 232. **Line 1:** Isaiah 18:3. **2:** Lamentations 4:6. **10:** 1 Samuel 18:8.

## AVRAHAM ABULAFIA

Just why there isn't more first-rate qabbalistic Hebrew poetry from Spain (or elsewhere, for that matter) has been a matter of some speculation. Gershom's Scholem's works are peppered with indications that he considers the subject of qabbalistic poetry a promising one for study, and he finds far more Qabbala in verse than do other scholars, such as Schirmann and Fleischer. Fleischer speculates that the paucity of qabbalistic poems may have something to do with the cerebral nature of Jewish mysticism on the one hand and the secular foundations of Spanish-Hebrew poetry on the other. Schirmann laments the fact that the qabbalists simply weren't good poets, or had a hard time expressing their complex thought and theories in poetry. More recently Moshe Idel has suggested that

the qabbalistic emphasis on *mitzvot*, the observance of the commandments within a mystical framework, in many ways occupied the place in Jewish mysticism that poetry occupied in the mystical traditions of other faiths; that is, the mystical performance of the commandments cathected the psychic energy that might otherwise have gone into the making of poems.

FROM *THE BOOK OF THE LETTER*

In making these selections from the some fourteen hundred lines of verse in *The Book of the Letter*, I have tried to give a sense of the poem's various modes (lyrical, narrative, apocalyptic) as well as its shifting rhythms and moods; I have not, however, included any of the most obscure language-centered passages, which are composed entirely of neologisms. Apart from the first section, the excerpts here are taken from the final 350 lines of the poem. My annotation is based on Moshe Idel's *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1988), pp. 95–105 and 157–58) and Scholem's lecture on Abulafia, published in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1946), pp. 119–55. For more detailed summaries of Abulafia's thought, see Idel (above), and *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, 1989), and Colette Sirat's *History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1985). The speaker in this poem is one Zekharyahu, whose name is numerologically equivalent to "Avraham," and the book has also been called *Sefer Zekharyahu*.

*And the letter is longing:*

*Sefer ha'Ot: Apokalypse des Pseudo-Propheten und Pseudo-Messias Abraham Abulafia*, ed. A. D. Jellinek, in *Jubelschrift zum Sibzigsten Geburtstage des Prof. Dr. H. Graetz, Breslau, 1897*, section 4, p. 70; M. Idel's manuscript (given to this translator), p. 5a, lines 277–88. The Hebrew involves anagrammatic play on "the letter" (*ha'ot*—*heh*, *aleph*, *vuv*, *tav*) and "desire" (*ta'ava*—*tav*, *aleph*, *vav*, *heh*), both of which are formed from four letters: *heh*, *aleph*, *vuv*, *tav*; in the same way the poem plays with "sky" (*hashahaq*) and "desire" (*hahosheq*—literally, "the one who desires"), both of which employ *heh*, *het*, *vuv*, *shin*, *quf*; in both cases only the vocalization differs. To get a sense of that dimension one might translate the opening as: "And the sign sings, / and sky is key / to knowing the will."

*And YHVH spoke:*

Jellinek, section 6, p. 81; Idel MS, p. 17a. "The letter" (or "sign") in Abulafia's thought indicates Active Intellect. Kingdom and Law are one of several conflicting forces that appear in the poem, and in Abulafia's thought generally. "Your father and mother" here are most likely Adam and Eve. Throughout his work Abulafia makes extensive use of Hebrew numerology (*gematria*); here, for instance, "my father and mother" = 70 = blood and ink = Adam and Eve. "And ink" = 26 = YHVH, while the pronounced form of the divine name (*Yod Heh Vav Heh*) = 44 = blood. The Sabbath's triumph over the days of the week is the triumph of the sacred over the profane, but also of intellect over imagination, and life

over death. In *Sefer HaMelitz*, Abulafia writes: “A line of life, a line of ink; and a line of death, a line of blood.” Elsewhere he states plainly: “‘Adam and Eve’ in numerology equals ‘my father and mother,’ and their secret is blood and ink, and this latter is proven by this name, יַחַוּחַ, and one who merits it will have engraved upon his forehead a *tav* [the Hebrew letter]—for one a *tav* of blood, for the other a *tav* of ink.” He goes on to derive the significance of that *tav* from its combination, when it is written out, with ink (*dyo*) in the word *yoledet* (she gives birth), as opposed to that of blood (*dam*) in *muledet* (she is born). In the former (*yoledet*), the letters *yod*, *lamed*, and *dalet* are combined with the *tav*; in the latter, the same three letters are combined with *mem* (as in blood). A follower of Abulafia’s thought, Isaac of Acre (in the thirteenth–mid-fourteenth century) writes: “The blood alludes to the secret of the sacrifices and the prayers, while ink is like the writing of the Torah in ink upon a book.” All of the above is drawn from Idel, *Mystical Experience in Abulafia*, pp. 96, 99, 155, and 158.

*The Lord showed me:*

Jellinek, section 7, p. 8r; Idel MS, pp. 18a–b. The vision of the man and his army is met with fear on the part of the poet-seer, which, as Idel notes (*Mystical Experience*, p. 119), might be taken as either a Jungian fear of encounter with the inner Self or a Rudolph Otto–like dread and awe before the “wholly Other.” Referring to another of Abulafia’s works (*Sitrei Torah*) in which the poet-seer cites *Sefer Yetzira* 5:2—“the heart in soul [i.e., within man] is like the king in a battle”—Idel is convinced of the internal nature of the events described. The man himself is an external product of the “intellectual flow.” The sign or letter on the man’s forehead, which stands for the letters of the divine name, becomes the fount of seventy tongues, that is, the Active Intellect. “The Active Intellect is the potion of life for those who are able to receive its flux, while for those who are unable to do so it is the potion of death” (Idel, p. 97). Likewise, the transformation of the colors here—black to red and vice versa—is indicative of the dual potential of the letter. *Shabbat* 55a: “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel: Go and record upon the forehead of the righteous a line of ink, that the angels of destruction may not rule over them; and upon the foreheads of the wicked a line of blood, so that the angels of destruction may rule over them.” At the end of this section, the phrase “and turned into another man” alludes to 1 Samuel 10:7, where prophecy itself transforms Saul.

*And from the bow of knowing:*

Jellinek, section 7, pp. 82–83; Idel MS, pp. 20a–20b.

*And I lifted up my eyes:*

Jellinek, section 7, p. 83; Idel MS, pp. 22a–23b. “The stone that drew it” is in Hebrew *even zohelet* (the stone of Zohelet—literally, a creeping stone), from 1 Kings 1:9, where Adonijah slays sheep and oxen, but here Abulafia seems to be describing a “magnet.” Later in the poem Abulafia says that the stone of Zohelet is the mind disturbed with terror and fear. “Vi.s.i.o.n” is marked (in the Hebrew) to indicate an acronym, most likely for *meshalim*, *remazim*, *aggadot*, *halakhot* (parables,

symbols, legends, and laws) = *marah* (vision). The old man in that vision, according to Idel, is Metatron (Prince of the Face or Presence), again the Active Intellect. What is central is that in this case, as with the previous vision, the encounter is between two men, in (Blakean) human form, not between disembodied intellectual capacities. The throne of judgment involves the “two attributes by which the word is led”: judgment and mercy.

*The name of the first warrior-king is Qadari’el:*

Jellinek, section 7, p. 84; Idel MS, pp. 24b–25a. The names of the kings would seem to reflect the powers they embody and might be understood as the East of God, the Word of God, the Rule of God, and the Era of God. Isaac of Acre describes the “four worlds” as emanation, creation, formation, and action. Yeho’el means, “God is willing” (Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 105). Elliot Wolfson identifies Yeho’el as Metatron, Prince of the Countenance (Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia, Kabbalist and Prophet* [Los Angeles, 2000], p. 101). “The year of mind” (or “spirit”—*shnat hamo’ah*) is the numerological shorthand (48) for the Hebrew year of 5048, or 1288 C.E., when he wrote the poem.

#### AVRAHAM BEN SHMU’EL

##### TO WHOM AMONG THE AVENGERS OF BLOOD

*HaShira* #396. A *seliha* in the form of a *rehuta*. Acrostic: *Avraham Ben Shmu’el*. See *Genesis Rabbah* 18 for the full inventory of body parts. Y. Ratzhaby traces the ideas in the poem to a fifth- or sixth-century Persian literary source (Y. Ratzhaby, *McGinzei Shirat HaQedem*, [Jerusalem, 1991], pp. 302–5.) **Line 1:** Numbers 35:21. **7:** Isaiah 54:16. **8:** *Sanhedrin* 7:4: “[These are the felons who are put to death by stoning . . .] he who beguiles [others to idolatry], and he who leads a whole town to idolatry.” **11:** Ecclesiasticus 9:3. **15:** Isaiah 30:16. **22:** Isaiah 49:17. **26:** The last two lines suggest that the poem could be read as part of the penitential service, leading into the standard prayer accompanying hymns of this sort, “God, King who sits on the throne of mercy, who acts with kindness, and pardons the sins of his people.”

#### YOSEF GIQATILLA

The spelling of the poet’s name varies; most often it is Giqatilla, but one also encounters Chiqatilla and Giqatilia.

##### THE NUT GARDEN

*Sefer Ginat Egoz leRibi Yosef Giqatilla* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 1.

**Line 3:** “Its” refers to “feeling”—something that is explicit in the gendered Hebrew.

## TODROS ABULAFIA

The “parables and riddles” (*meshalim vehidot*) of the title of Todros’s diwan are medieval synonyms for “poems and epigrams,” or verse in the standard Hebrew mode of the day. The terms are taken from Proverbs 1:6: “To understand a proverb (*mashal*), and a figure; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (*hidot*).” Some of Todros’s headings were in Arabic, and he also composed the prefaces to some of his shorter compilations in Arabic, especially those composed in his youth. The characterizations of Todros’s work are wide-ranging. “One of the greatest of Hebrew poets” is Moses Gaster’s, in the English foreword to his facsimile edition of Sha’ul ‘Abdullah Yosef’s manuscript copy, *Sefer Gan HaMeshalim veHaHidot leHaSar Todros HaLevi Ibn Abu al-‘Aafi’a, Kefi ‘Ataqat Mar Shaul Yosef meHong Kong meKhtav Yado Mamash Ketavnito Ketzuro, ‘Im Petah Davar* (London, 1926), 1:1. (This was the facsimile version from which Yellin worked to prepare his critical edition.) “A mediocre epigone” is how Schirmann sums up the opinions held by Brody and Yellin (*Toldot* [1997], p. 390). Schirmann himself writes in his anthology that, though Todros wasn’t in the “front rank” of Hebrew poets, a careful selection of his work reveals his “unique personality”; he was, says Schirmann, an “interesting” poet, worthy of a full critical study. Brody and Yellin, he continues, were judging Todros by the wrong criteria, for “in his best and unconventional poetry,” where Todros shocks the reader with his candor and personal approach, he is writing what Goethe called “fragments of a great confession” and in this respect is unmatched by any of the medieval Hebrew poets (*Toldot* [1997], pp. 389–90). In an earlier article, however, Schirmann had said that Todros was “superficial and repetitive,” and that his poems were primarily valuable for the historical material they contain (*Encyclopedia Judaica* [1972], 1:195). Sha’ul ‘Abdullah Yosef, for his part, calls Todros a “marvelous poet . . . unique among the poets of Israel,” and he singles out his craftsmanship, which he says excels that of Ibn Gabirol and HaLevi! (*Gan HaMeshalim*, vol. 2, part 2, page xlv). Yellin, who quotes these lines from one of Yosef’s letters, explains that by “craftsmanship” Yosef no doubt meant word play, including puns and clever employment of biblical phrases. Yellin adds that Todros reflects a “new spirit” in Hebrew poetry, one in which content takes precedence over style, and that he excelled at description. Calling Todros’s work egocentric (since it extended no further in its vision than the Jewish quarter of Toledo and was entirely lacking in national consciousness), historian Yitzhaq Baer adds: “God forbid that we should compare him to Ibn Gabirol or HaLevi!” Still, he says, Todros was a “real poet,” who wrote out of a deep inner need (“Todros Ben Yehuda HaLevi uZemano,” *Zion* 2, [1937]: 55; see also Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1: 123f.). Dan Pagis, however, held to the opinion that Todros was “one of the last great poets to appear in the Spanish school” (*Hiddush uMasoret beShirat haHol* [Jerusalem, 1976], p. 186). See also A. Doron, *Meshorer ba-Hatzer HaMelekh* (Tel Aviv, 1989), pp. 11–16. As Baer sees it, Todros’s work offers

a much fuller “autobiography” than anything we can find in the work of the troubadour poets. Fleischer has high praise for the poet’s lyricism, which he considers a resurrection of the Andalusian model. Despite the return to that classical model, says Fleischer, Todros was hardly a neoclassical writer; on the contrary, his temperament was romantic through and through: “There wasn’t a single Andalusian negative commandment (‘Thou shalt not’) that he didn’t violate.” On the whole Fleischer notes Todros’s anxious and belated relation to his classical predecessors, whom he often treats ironically, and he appreciates the energy, dexterity, and sharpness of his work (*Toldot* [1997], pp. 396–97). It is also Fleischer who says that Todros was “a graphomaniac (if it is possible to ignore the negative connotations of the term).” That is, he continues, Todros was “a poet for whom it was hard *not* to write,” and in this and other respects he resembles Shmu’el HaNagid (*Toldot* [1997], p. 391).

#### I’VE LABORED IN LOVE

*Gan HaMeshalim veHaHidot*, ed. D. Yellin (Jerusalem, 1932), #723; *HaShira*, #379. (All subsequent indications of sources for Todros Abulafia’s poems refer to Yellin; the headings in that collection were written by the poet himself.) **Heading:** “Of an Arab daughter whose love gave me pleasure, / when with other women I saw her, / as each was kissing her sister.” For another medieval Hebrew expression of a man’s desire to be a woman, see Qalonymos Ben Qalonymos’s “On Becoming a Woman,” below. **Line 8:** *Ketubot* 108b: “Admon laid down seven rulings: If a man dies and leaves sons and daughters, if the estate is large, the sons inherit it and the daughters are maintained [from it], and if the estate is small, the daughters are maintained from it, and the sons can go begging. Admon said, ‘Am I to be the loser because I am a male?’”

#### SHE SAID SHE WANTED

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #123; *HaShira*, #376. **Line 8:** Job 35:3.

#### THE DAY YOU LEFT

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #97. **Lines 5–6:** Lamentations 1:14: “The yoke of my transgressions . . . are come up upon my neck . . . the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, against whom I am not able to stand.”

#### THAT FINE GAZELLE

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #89; *HaShira*, #374. **Line 4:** Literally, “My friend . . .” **6:** Literally, “Leave desire and you’ll find relief.”

## THEY FIGHT WITH ME OVER DESIRE

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #104. **Line 4:** Deuteronomy 13:6.

## THAT GIRL EMERGED

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #70. **Line 4:** Deuteronomy 32:13: “And he made him to suck honey out of the crag [rock].”

## MAY MY TONGUE

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #98. **Line 1:** Psalms 137:6. **4:** Genesis 24:2: “[Abraham] said to his servant, . . . ‘Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh.’” The biblical gesture accompanied a vow and may have involved touching the genitals.

## THERE’S NOTHING WRONG IN WANTING A WOMAN

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #721; *HaShira*, #381. **Heading:** “I’ll make mention of my sins/and of (on) ‘*alamot* I’ll sing”—which plays on Genesis 41:9: “I must make mention today of my transgressions” and the heading to Psalms 46: “On ‘*alamot*, a song”—meaning either, (1) “with the musical instrument known as the ‘*alamot* I’ll sing”; (2) in a whisper I’ll sing; or (3) “of maidens I’ll sing.” In characteristic fashion, Todros turns what at first sounds like a confessional allusion on its head; as Brann notes, “the ‘confession’ is actually an avowal and the musical double-entendre is more like a celebration” (*Compunctious Poet*, p. 146). **Line 11:** Proverbs 9:13: “She is thoughtless and knoweth nothing.” **16:** Psalms 45:14: “Her raiment is of chequer work inwrought with gold.” **20:** Literally, “Alas,” or “Ah,” as in Ezekiel 6:11. **22:** Leviticus 20:15: “And if a man lie with a beast . . .”

## STRONG POET, WEAK POET

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #494. Part of a *tenso*-like exchange with a talented poet named Pinhas, about whom very little is known with any certainty. (*Tenso* is a Provençal term indicating a lyric poem of dispute or personal abuse.) He may in fact have been a member of a family of distinguished liturgical poets in Provence and northern Spain. The exchange seems to have begun in fraternity and ended in acrimony, after Pinhas slandered Todros in a long poem to Todros’s patron, Yitzhaq (#396 in Yellin)—though here too we don’t know for sure just when the thirty-five poems in the series were composed. **Heading:** “I laid him waste, / and from his own cup I gave him a taste.” **Line 4:** Judges 4:21, where Ya’el sticks the tent pin, or stake, into Sisera’s head. “Standards” translates *yated*, which is in this case a loaded word. It literally means “stake,” but it is also the word used to imply part of the quantitative poetic meter, which is composed of *yateds* and

*tenu'as* (short and long metrical feet); here, of course, it also means both “up-right pole” and “criteria.” It picks up on an image from Pinhas’s previous poem to Todros, where he says that the (sexual) power of his (Pinhas’s) own poems are sufficient to satisfy (literally, “to stick in the stake for”) two thousand women. Todros sets him straight with this reply. The passive partner in this context is considered an object of little worth at best, and shame at worst. The active partner is all virility.

#### PLASTER AND PEARLS

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #500. Also from the exchange with Pinhas. **Heading:** “And I said: Could rubies resemble sand? Can’t he distinguish between the sacred and the profane?” **Line 6:** Proverbs 24:31. **8:** Psalms 104:10. Literally, “Give me the valleys of your verse, my friend, and I will send forth springs into them.” **9:** Psalms 104:25.

#### NOTHING LEFT TO SAY

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #507. Also from the exchange with Pinhas, toward the end. The heading notes that he wrote this when Pinhas was slow in responding to another poem Todros had sent him. **Line 2:** *Sanhedrin* 97a: “The son of David will not come . . . until the last *peruta* (small coin) is gone from the purse.” **4:** Ezekiel 21:33. **5:** Ruth 2:15–16. **8:** 2 Kings 4:10: “Let us make, I pray thee, a little chamber on the roof; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table.” “Little chamber” in the Hebrew of 2 Kings is *‘aliyat qir* (literally, an upper room with a wall), which Abulafia changes to *‘aliyat shir* (an upper part of a poem, i.e., an opening stanza or line), as he puns on the notion of a stanza as a room (in Hebrew, a *bayit*, which means both a verse and a home).

#### TEACHERS AND WRITERS

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #735. **Line 4:** Literally, “You teach, and the law is like the others [teach it].” Schirmann, basing his reading on talmudic usage, understands “others” to mean “the *goyim* (nations/non-Jews).” Yellin suggests that it means, “You teach, but your rulings and understandings are not in line with those of the sages” (see *Baba Batra* 96b). **7–8:** This alludes to the well-known Hebrew proverb: “Learn from writers (*soferim*), not from books (*sefarim*).”

#### BEFORE THE KING

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #636. **Heading:** “When I went to the King to enter his service, I presented him with a cup—a work of fine craftsmanship, and on its brow I engraved [these verses] in a line.” **Line 6:** Exodus 23:14–15: “And none shall appear

before me empty-handed”—referring to the pilgrimage festivals, on which one “goes up” to Jerusalem.

#### MY KING

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #644. **Line 1:** The opening of the poem echoes the prayer from the morning liturgy—“May it be your will, Lord, . . . that you save me today . . . from brazen men”; the poet seems to be deliberately blurring sacred and secular realms (and concerns). **5–6:** *Hagigah* 15a. The translation is based on Davidson’s reading (in Yellin). Also Isaiah 52:7; Genesis 42:35: “Every man’s bundle of money was in his sack.”

#### POEMS FROM PRISON

##### I. *As Love Lives*

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #649; *HaShira*, #392:2. **Heading:** “When the king imprisoned us in the pit with the other viziers, in the place where the king’s prisoners are held, and we were given nothing to drink or eat—only foul water—and the lice and rodents gnawed at our flesh, and the bees pursued us, and no one went out and no one came in among our friends, I heard what sounded like the song of swifts and doves when the partridge is pursued in the hills, and in my distress I wrote these lines.” **Line 1:** Amos 8:14. **12:** 1 Kings 17:6: “and the ravens brought [Elijah] bread and flesh.”

##### II. *Treacherous Time*

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #655.

##### III. *The Filthy Lay in Darkness with Me*

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #831; *HaShira*, #392:1. Acrostic: *Todros*. This is an example of the *Todrosi’a* (pl. *Todrosi’ot*)—a form invented by the poet. See biographical note preceding the translations. Other *Todrosi’ot* follow below, where the acrostic *Todros* is noted. **Line 1:** Ezekiel 32:19. **5:** 1 Samuel 24:12. **6:** Psalms 51:14.

##### IV. *My Rings Have Fallen*

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #906; *HaShira*, #392:3. Acrostic: *Todros*. **Line 6:** *Shabbat* 157a.

##### V. *Is It the Lord*

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #686. One of several poems Todros wrote about his inability to compose. Medieval Hebrew poems about “writer’s block” are extremely rare: in fact, the only other poet who seems to have treated this subject directly was Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, in “I’ve Made You My Refuge,” above. (Shem Tov Arduziel’s *The Battles of the Pen and the Scissors* might also be addressing this topic.) See also other poems by Todros here, including “The Sea Casts Up Mire and Mud” (below). In contrast to the Golden Age poets, who continually boast of their literary powers, the later poets gradually reveal a dependency on the muse, and at times

present themselves as helpless before her, rather than as masters of song. On the whole, however, Todros cannot be said to be lacking in confidence. **Line 4:** His legacy as a Levite (Todros *HaLevi* Abulafia). **5:** Jeremiah 17:14. **9–10:** Isaiah 58:9.

#### TIME TRIES AS I DRIFT

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #682. The poet compares his struggles to a sea (of trials) on which man floats or glides. The poem indicates that one of his sons had died.

#### THE SEA CASTS UP MIRE AND MUD

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #855; *HaShira*, #392:7. Acrostic: *Todros*. **Line 1:** Isaiah 57:20. **3–4:** Psalms 12:9; Jeremiah 15:19. **8:** Literally, “one with wisdom toys with time, and entertains himself with ‘maybe’ and ‘if only.’” Schirmann interprets this as “Takes comfort in the hope of change.” **10:** Isaiah 40:15: “Behold, the nations . . . are counted as the small dust of the balance.”

#### ON A BIBLE WRITTEN BY SHMU’EL HANAGID

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #691. **Heading:** “What he wrote on a Bible, written in the hand of Shmu’el HaNagid, which he bought in Seville.” **Line 1:** I.e., Moses. **2:** Shmu’el HaNagid, the poet. Ibn Daud’s *Book of Tradition* notes that HaNagid served as a scribe and counselor to King Habbuus, meaning that he both wrote documents and copied them. **4:** Betzalel, the biblical artist and craftsman; Exodus 28:39.

#### TIME SPREADS ITS NETS

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #770. **Line 1:** Ezekiel 26:5, 14: “She [Tyre] shall be a place for the spreading of nets.” **3–4:** Psalms 75:6–8, 10:10. **10:** Psalms 16:6. **13–14:** Ecclesiastes 4:6. **16:** Genesis 6:9. **17–18:** Ecclesiastes 3:19. **19–20:** 1 Samuel 2:3. **22:** Ecclesiastes 11:5. **23–24:** Literally, “shouldn’t be dwelt on.” “Secret scroll” refers to talmudic matters (such as new halakhic rulings) that, while originally transmitted orally, were written down so as not to be forgotten—though they may not have been intended for wide distribution. See *Shabbat* 6b and *Baba Metzia* 92a. “Sealed words” are matters pertaining to the “end of days,” as in Daniel 12:9: “These words are secret and sealed till the time of the end.”

#### OLD AGE IS DOUBLE-EDGED

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #804. **Heading:** “The splendor of age’s silver on the head I pronounced, but that ‘old men’s glory is the hoary beard’ [Proverbs 20:29, with a change of vocalization] I denounced.” **Line 1:** Literally, “Old age can be divided

two ways, and this is how I make that division.” Or: there are two aspects to aging. **4:** Psalms 133:2: “[To dwell together] is like precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard”; 1 Samuel 21:14.

#### PERVERSION’S PIGEONS

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #863. Acrostic: *Todros*. Lines 2, 4, and 6 in the original end with a homonym rhyme: *moreh*. **Line 1:** The Hebrew *‘avel* might also be understood in this case as “falsehood.” **9–10:** The Hebrew alludes to the mystical *Sefer Yetzira*’s (1:1) *sefer* (book, text, scripture) and *sippur* (story, telling, communication), which are of course sufficiently obscure in context, though the literal meaning is straightforward. It also refers to the midrashic texts *Sifra* and *Sifrei*—the implication being that the latter are even less well known.

#### MY THINKING WOVE

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #924. Acrostic: *Todros*. **Line 1:** Isaiah 59:5; Exodus 26:31. **2:** *Numbers Rabbah* 12:4: “Call it [the sun] purple, because the Lord, blessed be He, created it to weave manna for creation.” In the logic of the midrashic image, which the poet adopts, the sun is called “purple” or “crimson” (Song of Songs 3:9–10) and sends rain that in turn yields the nectar and sweetness of fruit, or “manna”—so that the manna is, as it were, spun as an extension of the woven purple of the sun on its throne. **4:** Literally, “expressed in pleasant words”; Song of Songs 7:2. **6:** Hosea 2:1. **8:** Genesis 47:23. *Avot* 4:3: “Despise not any man and regard nothing as impossible; for you find no man who has not his hour, and no thing which has not its place.”

#### THE LORD IS GOOD AND SO I’M TORMENTED

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #899. Acrostic: *Todros*. **Line 1:** The poem begins with a nearly direct quotation from Psalms 119:71. **5:** Isaiah 6:5. **9–10:** The Hebrew contains a complicated pun, an echo of which the English picks up in a slight departure from the literal reading. The line literally reads: “You who forgive and are good, I have only a verse [literally, ‘house’] of the poem for you as an offering; take my verse which I have brought”—with the word for “verse” being identical to that for “house” (*bayit*), and with the two Hebrew words for “here-is my-verse” (*he veiti*), being identical to the Hebrew word for “I’ve brought” (*heveiti*).

#### DEFILED AND PURE ARE ONE

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #930. Acrostic: *Todros*. **Line 5:** Isaiah 22:2; Job 36:29. **6:** Jeremiah 48:44. **8:** Genesis 20:16: “You have been cleared.” Yellin glosses: “See, and know.” **10:** Joshua 1:9.

## ON HEARING CHURCH BELLS

*Gan HaMeshalim*, #983; *HaShira*, #393. **Line 1:** The Hebrew opens: “*Hayaronu tzi‘irim lasi‘irim*.” For *tzi‘irim* here, some commentators read “villains,” and others say it refers to the young monks of a specific order. It is also possible to read the word in the Arabic-influenced Andalusian pronunciation, wherein the Hebrew letter *tzadei* would be pronounced as an *s* instead of *tz*—so that *tzi‘irim* (which normally means “young men”)—would allude to their being “hairy” (*si‘irim*), like the satyrs (also *si‘irim*) they sing to. In any event, Christian practice here is likened to strange or heathen worship: Leviticus 17:7: “And they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices unto the satyrs, after whom they go astray.” “Satyrs” can also be understood as “demons,” as in Rashi’s commentary to the verse and R. David Qimhi’s *Sefer Shorashim*. See also Isaiah 13:21. Schirrmann glosses, “their gods”—the gods of the young men. **2:** Literally, “the God of creation.” **3:** Psalms 119:62. **8:** Literally, “God of worlds on high and below, who brings down and exalts.” **9–10:** The Hebrew plays on the image of crossing *yam suf* (the Red Sea or Sea of Reeds) and *yam tzuf* (the sea of honey), again confusing the *tz* and *s*—see line 1, above. Also 1 Samuel 9:5. **14:** Proverbs 3:15. **22:** I.e., they make honey and sting; Deuteronomy 1:44 and *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 1:6. (See Ibn Gabirol’s “The Bee,” above).

## I TAKE DELIGHT IN MY CUP AND WINE

*Gan HaMeshalim*, vol. 2, part 2, *muwashshah* 35; *HaShira*, #377:2. **Line 8:** Song of Songs 7:3. **23:** The daughter of Canaan, in this case, is most likely a Slavic girl. **39–40:** The lines treat the conventional figure of Arabic love poetry, the *‘aadhil* (reprover or reproacher). In both Hebrew and Arabic poetry he almost always shadows a would-be male lover; here it seems he is watching a woman. Ibn Hazm writes of the reproacher in *The Ring of the Dove*: “Love has it various misfortunes: of these the first is the Reproacher. . . . There are diverse kinds. The original sort is a friend, between whom and yourself the burden of cautiousness has been let drop. . . . The second type . . . is the thorough-going scolder” (trans. Arberry, [1953; London, 1994], p. 96). **43–44:** The Arabic *kharja* reads, literally, “If a man [someone] is looking at me, /because of my thinness he wouldn’t see me.”

## NAHUM

## WINTER HAS WANED

*Shirei Nahum*, ed. Y. David (Jerusalem, 1974), #1; *HaShira*, #397. A *me’ora*, or “poem of light.” Acrostic: *Nahum*. The strophes have been recast slightly in the English in the interest of flow and coherence. **Lines 11–14:** Isaiah 13:14; Song of Songs 8:2, 8:14. **18:** Song of Songs 7:3. Milk and wine represent discrete examples

of love's pleasures; though the Hebrew has, literally, "wine with milk," the line isn't implying that they're drunk together. **21–22:** Song of Songs 5:13. **28:** Numbers 24:6. **30:** Numbers 28:10. **33:** Proverbs 31:7: "Let him drink and forget his poverty." **35:** Song of Songs 2:9. **36:** Song of Songs 7:4. The beloved himself in Song of Songs is likened to a "gazelle," so it is natural for it to graze with fawns. **40:** Psalms 61:3. **42:** Song of Songs 5:10. **41:** According to *Shabbat* 22b, the western lamp (or branch of the candelabra) of the Temple burned the longest. The miracle of its endurance testified to the Divine Presence in Israel. **43:** An epithet for God. Ezekiel 28:14, according to the Targum and Rashi: "who rules supreme." **44:** I.e., the light given by this lamp is the light, and hope, of redemption.

### AVRAHAM HABEDERSHI

#### WHY THE POET REFUSES TO FIGHT

*HaShira*, #400:1. HaBedershi tries to avoid dealing with HaGorni, who has tirelessly, and loudly, sought the more established poet's support and approval. He begins with an ironic jab at HaGorni's honor, suggesting that quarreling with him isn't worth his (HaBedershi's) time. The poems allude to the legend, recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings, about what the Amazons cleverly told Alexander in order to avoid a fight. *Leviticus Rabbah* 27:8, for instance, notes that immediately after the women said this to Alexander, "he turned away and departed. And then he wrote on the door of the gate of the city, 'I, Alexander of Macedon, a king, was a fool until I came to the town of Kartigna [i.e., of the Amazons] and learned wisdom from women.'" Also, *Tamid* 32a, *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* 9:74a), and elsewhere.

#### YOUR MUSE

*HaShira*, #400:3. Soon the gloves are taken off and numerous poems are exchanged, including two that are ninety-eight and sixty-five Hebrew lines respectively. HaBedershi aims wherever he can, below the belt or for the poetic jugular. He wrote often of the mysterious *banot hashir* ("daughters of song," or Muses, as in Ecclesiastes 12:4), usually as an indication of what he felt were his own superior poetic gifts. The term could also refer simply to "your poem." **Line 2:** Literally, "if you don't choose the throng like whores," as in Psalms 55:15 ("he walketh with the throng"). "Troubadour" is in keeping with the cultural context of the time, especially that of the literary jousting with HaGorni. And as the biographical introduction notes, HaBedershi was at the very least aware of the Provençal troubadour poets. That he explicitly mentions Provençal poets who were known for their ethical and admonitory verse suggests that his acquaintance with their work was most likely more than superficial. **4:** Literally, "she became a concubine."

The Hebrew involves a complicated pun on one of the biblical names in Genesis 36:12.

#### LAMENT FOR A FOE

H. Schirmann, “Iyyunim beQovetz HaShirim shel Avraham HaBedershi,” in *LeToldot HaShira veHaDrama Ha'Ivrit* (Jerusalem 1979), p. 418. Also in *Toldot* (1997), p. 490, note 100. These lines were excerpted from a longer poem (in manuscript only) and published by Schirmann in his essay on HaBedershi.

#### THE POET'S DISTRESS

*HaShira*, #403. The context of this epigram isn't clear; but it seems to have been part of a separate exchange.

#### YITZHAQ HAGORNI

##### WOULD YOU TELL ME

*Shirei Avraham HaBedershi veYitzhak HaGorni veHugam*, ed. A. M. Habermann, (Jerusalem, 1969), p. 34. **Heading:** “When HaGorni told of all the great things he'd accomplished in the land where he dwelled, a valiant man approached him who thought there was something wrong with his song, and he said: ‘I will listen, and look into [his song], and set it right,’ but he couldn't.”

##### HAGORNI'S LAMENT

*Shirei HaBedershi*, p. 41; *HaShira*, #409. The somewhat obscure heading reads: “A *haluq* of HaGorni and his final words on desire and lust, and this while he was still in his prime, and had many years before him.” According to Ezra Fleischer, the term *haluq* is derived from the French literary term *cong * (departure/separation), which in HaGorni's day indicated a lyrical poem treating the poet's departure from a city, friends, or life itself. In this case, the departure is from the licentious mode of life HaGorni led in the past. Fleischer reads it as a poem of penitence; Schirmann says it is distinctive for the grotesquery of the cultish practice it depicts and for its *lack* of true penitence. **Line 1:** Judges 11:4. **5:** Lamentations 5:15. **9:** Song of Songs 2:17. **19–20:** Daniel 10:8: “my comeliness [was turned in me into corruption]”; NJPS has “my vigor has been destroyed.” **33–34:** Literally, “before they're made into images (*temunot*)”—that is, something that could be used for idolatrous worship or in amulets. At least *this* bit of him will be spared. The poet's boasting seems here to give way to the remorse of which Fleischer speaks, though that hardly diminishes the pride he takes in his sexual exploits.

## YEDAYA HAPENINI

Scholars assume that the poet's epithet refers to Perpignan, though no connection between the two words has been established. For Fleischer's characterization of Yedaya's book, see *Toldot* (1997), p. 530, n. 68.

## THE WORLD IS A RAGING SEA

*Behinat 'Olam* (Vilna, 1879; reprinted Jerusalem, 1980), book 8; *HaShira*, #412. **Lines 1–2:** Jonah 1:15; Psalms 104:25. **6–7:** Proverbs 16:15; Job 33:30. **10–11:** *Pirquei Avot* 4:29. **17–18:** Job 28:22; Exodus 14:22. **19–20:** Ezekiel 22:14. **21–22:** Ecclesiastes 2:26. **25–28:** Daniel 11:10; Jonah 1:4. **36–38:** Literally, “from the juice of the pomegranates of your haughtiness”; Lamentations 1:19. **43:** Psalms 42:8. **40–41:** Job 38:16. **45–46:** Literally, “and none saith: Restore [him/it]”—as in Isaiah 42:22.

## AVNER [OF BURGOS?]

## THE LAST WORDS OF MY DESIRE

*Sefer Yovel leDoktor S. Federbush*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Jerusalem, 1961), section 2, pp. 176–77. The full poem has seven parts (pp. 175–99). Schirmann attributes the poem to Avner of Burgos; Habermann disagrees, claiming that Avner the apostate wasn't known as a penitent Jew—though of course that judgment involves a very limited reading of the poem. The vocalization of the Hebrew text is problematic in several places and has not always been followed in this translation. **Lines 1–9:** These lines involve a homophone inversion of 2 Samuel 23:1–3: “Now these are the last words of David; the saying of David the son of Jesse, and the song of the man raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet singer of Israel.” Small changes of sound yield the opposite of Scripture's import: *ne'um David ben Yishai* (the saying of David the son of Jesse), for instance, becomes *ne'um day leha'vid ben shay* (the saying—speech/utterance—sufficient to wholly consume one who brings an offering, etc.). The original Hebrew is also obscure. **2:** Instead of *lo sharim*, read *le'asherim* (to idols). **5–7:** I.e., this is the utterance of a creature (desire, or “the evil impulse”) which is anointed of alien gods and thrives on, or near, misfortune and ruin. Judges 10:6: “And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served . . . the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon.” **8:** This line—*u'ne'im zarot el zar benei zenunim*—plays on *ne'im zemirot yisra'el* (“the sweet singer of Israel,” again Samuel 23:1) and most likely alludes to Jesus. **10:** I.e., serve pagan gods and forces, not the Lord. Jeremiah 7:18: “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings unto other

gods.” There may also be an undercurrent of association with various New Testament passages that identify Jesus with that stone (e.g. Matthew 21:42 and 1 Peter 2:7). **13:** Proverbs 22:5. **14–15:** Psalms 118:22. **16–17:** Song of Songs 8:13. **18–19:** Psalms 50:16. **20–21:** Deuteronomy 32:17. **23–25:** *Sanhedrin* 82a; the Hebrew employs the acronym NASHGaz, referring to *nidda* (a menstruating woman), *shifha* (a non-Jewish maidservant), *goya* (a heathen woman), and *zona* (a whore)—all of whom are considered unclean and forbidden. Also Genesis 30:1. **26:** Isaiah 17:10: “For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation. . . . Therefore thou didst plant plants of pleasantness, and didst set it with the slips of a stranger [or: but it proved a disappointing slip].” A textual emendation by the editor notes that the Hebrew should have *na‘manim* (as in Isaiah) instead of *ma‘manim*. **28:** Jeremiah 5:8. **29–30:** These lines turn on its head the well-known passage from Proverbs 31:10, which enumerates the virtues of the “woman of valor” and the ideal wife. **33:** Proverbs 6:19. **35–36:** Isaiah 1:23. **38:** Isaiah 59:10. **39:** Lamentations 4:5. **40:** Isaiah 21:5. **41:** Isaiah 66:17. **43:** Proverbs 30:26. **45:** Habakkuk 2:16.

#### QALONYMOS BEN QALONYMOS

Qalonymos appears in Immanuel’s *Mahberot* in chapter 25. The carnivalesque reading of at least this section of *Even Bohan* is Tova Rosen’s, in *Unveiling Eve*, pp. 168–86. She notes that Qalonymos’s “assault on gender prejudices and his sympathy with the female sex is unequivocal. . . . Maleness is shown to be a competitive life track, an unwearied race after summits of intellectual fulfillment, a phallic arrow launched into the expanse of knowledge, an enormous intellectual odyssey. . . . That the journey ends with coming back home is of no wonder. . . . In contrast to the infinite and threatening male universe, the female space is delimited and warm, kind, and protected. . . . The vertical-phallic quest for the Logos takes place in an arid landscape, whereas woman’s material sphere is horizontal and plentiful.” Rosen notes that Qalonymos’s critique goes well beyond the issue of gender, and *Even Bohan* includes “caricatures of Jewish social types,” as well as “angry admonitions against gluttony, debauchery, gambling and fascination with clothes, and the satirist’s joy in the human body, its needs, and laughter.”

#### ON BECOMING A WOMAN

*Even Bohan*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Tel Aviv, 1956), pp. 19–20; *HaShira*, #413:1, lines 27–40. **Line 4:** This alludes to a well-known legend, based on *Genesis Rabbah* 38, telling of how Abraham was saved from the fiery furnace into which the Chaldean king Nimrod had him thrown after he’d destroyed his father’s idols. **6:** *Berakhot* 60a, where Leah (Dina’s mother) was pregnant with a male child but asked God to turn the fetus into a female. **7:** Exodus 7:10. **8–9:** Exodus 4:3, 4:6,

14:16, 26ff. The Red Sea of the English Bible is literally, the Sea of Reeds (and most scholars now assume was it was an inlet of the Mediterranean). 10–11: Psalms 66:6; Joshua 3:13–17. 14–15: Psalms 114:8; Isaiah 58:11. 16–17: The labor of men in this context would include religious and intellectual obligations. 20–22: *Sanhedrin* 5b discusses “permanent defects” (or “irremovable blemishes”), as opposed to “passing defects” (or “removable blemishes”). The poem is of course referring to the penis. The section from which this excerpt has been drawn begins: “How defective [deformed/crippled/wounded] one is with an *etzba* (finger). And how much shame must he bear who was minted with the stamp of men.” That line could also be understood as meaning “How much damage did he [God] do with a finger [i.e., his finger, with which he sent the plagues upon the Egyptians].” 28: *Sanhedrin* 88a. 29: *Berakhot* 9:3 and 5: “It is incumbent on man to bless [God] for the evil in the same way as for the good, as it says, ‘Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart’—with thy two impulses, the evil impulse as well as the good impulse.” 30–31: One of the regular morning benedictions said by men.

#### YITZHAQ POLGAR

To Polgar’s opening epigram, expressing disgust with Avner’s treatise, Avner responds: “Every lion has its roar, and from afar/the weak at heart is seized with trembling./Hearing it, his two ears ring;/but what will he do on the Day of Reckoning?” Polgar responds to that as follows: “The lion’s roar and cry of man/are both the bleating of goats to me. //But one who looks like a lion was scared,/and at the sound of my voice grew angry. //For all the world’s great mysteries—/in my mind’s eye I see. //I wasn’t afraid, in fact I soared—/and all who heard, with me roared.” (See A. Carmoli, *Literaturblatt des Orients* 16 (1840): 245.)

#### FAITH’S PHILOSOPHY, PHILOSOPHY’S FAITH

*Ezer HaDat* leR. *Yitzhaq Poliagar*, ed. Y. Levinger (Tel Aviv, 1984), part 2, p. 71 and pp. 91–93; *HaShira*, #415, lines 45–49. Taken out of context, and given its vehemence, the first poem might seem to be referring to Avner; within the dialogue, however, the speaker is the elderly, conservative Torah scholar, who is attacking the younger good-looking philosopher for the introduction of doctrine foreign to Scripture. The second poem is spoken by the author.

#### SHEM TOV ARDUTIEL (SANTOB DE CARRIÓN)

For an adaptation of Shem Tov’s Spanish proverbs—which have survived in Hebrew transliteration—see my “Suite for Santob,” *Hymns & Qualms*. For a full

prose translation of the work with extensive commentary, see T. Perry, *The Moral Proverbs of Santob de Carrión: Jewish Wisdom in Christian Spain*, (Princeton, 1987). Machado's comments appear in Antonio Machado, *Selected Poems*, trans. A. Trueblood (Cambridge, 1982), p. 10. The title of Shem Tov's narrative is sometimes cast in the singular: *Milhemet Ha'Et veHaMisparayim* (The Battle of the Pen . . .). Susan Einbinder's study, "Pen and Scissors, A Medieval Debate," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 65 (1995), makes a convincing argument against the various one-to-one allegorical readings that have been proposed. Regarding the reading of the work as describing "the plight of a writer isolated, in what he considers extreme circumstances, from his community," she notes that Shem Tov's "desperate search for a new form of writing adequate for expressing his condition of crisis is depicted in his resort to an unnatural tool—the scissors—as the means to overcome silence and write." *The Battles of the Pen and the Scissors* is also known as *Ma'asei HaRav* (The Rabbi's Tale).

Einbinder comments further on the nature of the two types of writing: "The script of the Scissors, air cut into paper, is pure Form without Matter. The Pen, in contrast, fuses form and matter, shaping ink on the page. The Pen is also a phallic agent of the narrator, drawing from the inchoate matter of ink (grammatically feminine—and producing letters on the scroll (*megilla*) or letter (*iggeret*)—both also feminine words. In contrast, the self-sufficiency of the Scissors, a plural which is also one, is depicted by the Pen as unnatural and dangerous. Whatever extreme solution the Scissors' writing represents to Arudiel, the frozen ink of the story and the dented tip of the Pen describe a situation of threatened potency in which the writer cannot write." Einbinder then quotes a line by the thirteenth-century Arabic "scissors poet" Humayd ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari al-Qurtubi: "Cutting reveals letters which have vanished./Amazing! A thing whose presence is its absence" ("Pen and Scissors," p. 272).

#### FROM *THE BATTLES OF THE PEN AND THE SCISSORS*

##### I. *Writer, You Hold*

*Ma'asei HaRav* (*Milhemet Ha'Et veHaMisparayim*), ed. Y. Nini and M. Fruchtmann (Tel Aviv, 1980), p. 41; *HaShira*, #417:1, lines 22–23. The action begins with the narrator's praise of his pen, which is summed up in this poem. **Line 2:** Nahum 3:3. **3:** Genesis 2:9. **4:** The allusion is to Moses' rod and the miracles or "signs" he produces with it, as in Exodus 4:17 and elsewhere.

##### II. *To Praise the Pen*

*Ma'asei HaRav*, p. 45. The praise of the narrator's pen continues. **Line 2:** Literally, "Is it excessive on the part of the single thing to both make mention of what was lost and preserve it?" **7–8:** *Shevu'ot* 20b: "[The commandments] 'Remember [the Sabbath day],' and 'Keep [the Sabbath day]' were pronounced in a single utterance—an utterance which the mouth cannot utter nor the ear hear"; Exo-

dus 20:8: “Remember the Sabbath day”; Deuteronomy 5:12: “Observe the Sabbath day.”

### III. *Tomorrow I’ll Write*

*Ma’asei HaRav*, p. 53; *HaShira*, #417:2, lines 83–85. Meanwhile, the narrator has discovered that the inkwell has frozen solid and his pen is unable to crack the ice and withdraw any ink. He begins cursing his pen vehemently; the pen fights back and takes the narrator to task for his cruelty and for his having forgotten the pen’s years of loyalty and service. Finally it suggests that the author try to crack the ice with his own finger instead of with the delicate nub of the pen. He tries, but the jagged ice cuts his finger and rips his fingernail. The narrator then admits that the elements have gotten the better of him, and he recites this poem. Machado refers to the town as “cold Soria.” **Line 1:** *Omair emesh*—which might also be understood as “Yesterday he says” or “Last night he says.” Genesis 31:29. **5–6:** Proverbs 27:1.

### IV. *Enter the Scissors*

*Ma’asei HaRav*, p. 57. The poet hears a voice which tells him to forget about the pen and the frozen ink, and think of other options. One could, for instance, write with scissors. And so begins a series of rhymed-prose lines in praise of the scissors and scissor writing, and then a series of metrical poems on the same subject. **Line 1:** I.e., the paper in which the scissors have cut out words. **2:** Job 13:28. Literally, “but this is among the written” (as opposed to the standard scriptural idiom, “among the living”). **3–4:** These lines employ the language of, and allude directly to, the morning prayer, “Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has fashioned man with wisdom and created within him many cavities [hollows].”

### V. *Work I Was Cut Out to Do*

*Ma’asei HaRav*, p. 61. In the Hebrew the rhyme words are homonyms—*ru’ah*—meaning in this context “thought/spirit,” “soul/spirit,” and “wind.” **Line 1:** The opening of the poem is missing in the Hebrew. **3–4:** Psalms 18:11 and 104:4.

### VI. *The Pen Fights Back*

*Ma’asei HaRav*, p. 63. **Lines 3–4:** Proverbs 13:12. **5–6:** I.e., your slow pace makes all who wait for you drowsy. Proverbs 19:15 and 23:21: “Drowsiness shall clothe a man in rags” (“in tatters” [NJPS]).

### VII. *The Scissors Longed*

*Ma’asei HaRav*, p. 80. The final word is given to the scissors, as the *maqama* comes to a close with this poem, summarizing the scissors’ desire. A twenty-two-line colophon follows in the voice of the author, thanking God for the powers He bestows, and noting that this poem too was written “without a pen and not with ink,” toward the end of the month of Tammuz (approximately July), 1345.

## SHMU'EL IBN SASSON

For more on Ibn Sasson see R. Brann, A. Saenz-Badillos, and J. Targarona Borrás, “The Poetic Universe of Samuel Ibn Sasson, Hebrew Poet of Fourteenth-Century Castile,” *Prooftexts* 16/1 (1996). They note that, while some scholars claim Ibn Sasson was raised or educated in Toledo, there is in fact no proof that he ever left Carrión de los Condes and Fromista. The rhymed-prose heading to “They Will Be Tried” appeared in poem 7 of the Chamiel edition (see below).

## MAN'S PERIL

*Sefer Avnei HaShoham*, ed. H. Chamiel (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, 1962), #28. **Line 4:** Ecclesiastes 7:26: “I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets”; Proverbs 27:8: “[The strange woman’s] house is the way to the nether-world.” In the original the final words of lines 2 and 4 are homonymous: *margalit* (pearl) and *mar galit* (bitterness you revealed).

## WHY MOST POETS ARE POOR

*Avnei HaShoham*, #17; *HaShira*, #416. **Heading:** “I wrote this about the poets who are not rich.” **Lines 3–4:** Genesis 43:32. **5–6:** Psalms 62:5. **9–10:** Job 4:13. **11–12:** *Ketubot* 103b: “cast bile among the students.” **23–24:** Isaiah 47:13. **25–26:** Proverbs 23:19. **27–28:** Psalms 33:14. **29–30:** Job 38:41: “Who provideth for the raven his prey, when his young cry unto God, and wander for lack of food?” **31–32:** Isaiah 1:23. **37–38:** 1 Samuel 21:16: “Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow?” In other words, writers and lunatics belong together. **39:** Alas, these fools know nothing. **43–44:** *Berakhot* 32a. **45–46:** Zephaniah 2:14. **47–48:** Nehemiah 12:46. **49–50:** Jeremiah 10:7.

## THEY WILL BE TRIED

*Avnei HaShoham*, # 8, lines 79ff. **Line 1:** Jeremiah 50:20. **2:** Literally, “and circumcised them.” **4:** Psalms 49:7. **5:** Exodus 3:7. **9:** Jeremiah 51:51. **11:** Deuteronomy 6:5. **12:** Literally, “the Lord surely remembered them.” Genesis 50:24. **12:** Zechariah 2:16. **13:** Exodus 2:23–24.

## MOSHE NATAN

The executive committee of the Barcelona conference asked the king to request that the Pope issue orders for the protection of the Jewish community. For more on the conference, see Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, pp. 25ff.

## PRISON

*Totza'ot Haim*, in Menahem di Lonzano, *Shtei Yadot* (Husyatin, 1909), part 29, p. 11b; *HaShira*, #418:2.

## From “THE TEN COMMANDMENTS”

## I.

*Totza'ot Haim*, part 10, p. 7b; *HaShira*, #418:1. **Line 2:** Psalms 23:3.

## II.

*Totza'ot Haim*, part 10, p. 7b. **Lines 1–2:** Genesis 4:10. **4:** I.e., “the killer of people” (literally, “of a person”). Numbers 31:19.

## III.

*Totza'ot Haim*, part 10, p. 7b. **Line 2:** Literally, “Worship Him and you’ll be free.” See Yehuda HaLevi’s “Slaves of Time” (above) for a superior treatment of the same theme.

## CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

*Totza'ot Haim*, part 34, p. 12b; *HaShira*, #418:6. **Lines 1–2:** Jeremiah 25:38, 44:22. **4:** Amos 1:6.

## SHELOMO DEPIERA

The Saragossa group was also known by other names, including *Kat HaMeshorerim* and *Hevrat Nognim*. Regarding the quality of DePiera’s (or DaPiera’s) work, it is possible that his earlier work was superior to what has survived, though Vidal Benveniste’s harsh criticism of his teacher would suggest otherwise. Don Shelomo’s family also went by the Spanish name “de la Caballería,” owing to the connection they maintained to the Templar order. “Frightening monotony” is Ezra Fleischer’s characterization (*Toldot* [1997], p. 606). Raymond Scheindlin comments: “The contrast between the age of Todros Abulafia and that of Solomon DaPiera is palpable. Whereas, in the former it seems to be looking outward, in the latter, it seems to turn in on itself, even as the poems produced by DaPiera and his contemporaries habitually revert, in their last lines, to their openings” (“Fifteenth-Century Poetry in Spain,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel [New York, 1997], pp. 34–36). (I have not translated any of DePiera’s “circular” poems. See, instead, Benveniste’s “The Tongue Speaks and the Hand Records,” and Bonafed’s “World Gone Wrong” and “Wherever You Go.”) This inwardness, Scheindlin adds, can be explained in part as a response to the external threat presented by the events of

1391, which forced the Jewish writers to withdraw from the outside world and look back to the glories of the past, producing “a literature that was merely an extended homage to that past.” But he also notes that there were more complex cultural factors at work, and that in fact the upper-class Jews were not at all cut off from the surrounding Christian/Spanish culture. So the Hebrew poets may in fact have looked outward, but imitation of what they found in the new court literature of the European vernaculars (which looked to the classical Latin and troubadour past in order to create something new in the stylized vernacular present) produced a very different effect in the context of Hebrew literature. For fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Hebrew was a classical language and not, like Romance or Provençal, a vernacular, and so the imitation of European trends in Hebrew resulted in the creation of a closed circuit, as it were, with the classical literature of the past being reflected in the classical language of the present. That, along with the gradually increasing distance from the Arabic root of Hebrew medieval poetry, brought about the attenuation of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Lines of energy and poetic transfer were opened for Spanish-Jewish poets, by contrast, in Ladino, and for Italian-Hebrew poets, who would inject new blood into their poetry from the vernacular verse of their day.

#### THINKERS WITH THINKING

*HaShira*, #429:3. **Line 3:** Numbers 22:23

#### THE BEE AND THE GRUMBLER

*HaShira*, #429:1. **Lines 4:** Literally, “and its mouth [the arrow’s] . . .”

#### MEDIEVAL ARTHRITIS

*Diwan shel Shelomo Ben Meshullam DaPiera*, ed. S. Bernstein (New York, 1942), #129. **Line 4:** Exodus 1:16, where the “birthstools” are two stones the woman sits upon. 1 Samuel 4:19. **6:** Ezekiel 21:11: “Sigh, therefore, son of man, with the breaking of thy loins.” (NJPS: “Sigh, on tottering limbs and bitter grief.”)

#### WINTER IN MONZÓN

*HaShira*, #427. **Heading:** “And one day I was sitting at home during a downpour, and the heavy cloud was releasing its torrent, and to make matters worse, the poet Don Vidal, whose poems ‘hold up their hooves’ [like a pig—to demonstrate that it is ‘kosher,’ i.e., of cleft hoof, while in fact demonstrating to all that it is, in fact, a pig—i.e., not kosher], seeming to honor my name but in his heart lying in

wait for me (Jeremiah 9:7), as he has done in the past. And I too will not hold back, and I answered him.” The excerpt translated here contains only the opening of DePiera’s retort, the description of winter in the country. For the image of the pig holding up its hooves, see *Leqah Tov* 8: 29b and Jeremiah 9:7. **Line 2:** Deuteronomy 25:18. **4:** Leviticus 11:35. **10:** Isaiah 59:15. **11–12:** Jeremiah 36:22; Job 27:6. **15–16:** Isaiah 50:11; 2 Samuel 23:20. **17–18:** The language alludes to the story of the sacrifice (binding) of Isaac. **25:** Job 3:8.

#### AFTER CONVERSION (TO VIDAL BENVENISTE)

*Shirei Don Vidal Benveniste*, ed. T. Vardi (M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986), #15\*. This poem was written after the poet’s conversion to Christianity and sent to Don Vidal Benveniste, who responded with a particularly harsh poem of his own, using the same imagery. DePiera’s use of the image of the whore may have emerged—consciously or not—from his guilt (over his conversion), but it also left him exposed, as it were, to Benveniste’s brutal rejoinder (“To a Poet-Friend Too Much in Need,” below). Schirmann comments that many of the “new Jews” who converted in 1391 and following the Disputation at Tortosa were particularly zealous in their adopted faith, while others took up the split life of secret Jews (known as *Conversos*, *Anusim*, or *Marranos*); still others converted out of convenience and were as apathetic to Christianity as they had been to Judaism (*Toldot* [1997], pp. 585–86). **Lines 3–6:** Isaiah 23:15: “Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years. . . . It shall fare with Tyre as with the song of the harlot; Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot long forgotten. Make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered”; Job 28:27.

#### TABERNACLES: A PRAYER

*Diwan Shirei Qodesh shel Shelomo Ben Meshullam DaPiera*, ed. S. Bernstein (Cincinnati, 1946), #4; *HaShira*, #431. A *reshut* for Sukkot. Acrostic: *Shelomo*. **Line 1:** “He” refers to the people of Israel (*‘am Israel*). While “the congregation of Israel” (*knesset Israel*) is feminine, and most liturgical poems of this sort involve a feminine *knesset Israel* and a masculine deity, often in an allegorical situation of love and rejection, here the reference (*‘am*) is grammatically and figuratively masculine. **2:** Deuteronomy 32:7, which mentions the “years of many generations” in which Israel dwelled as a self-sufficient and prosperous nation alone, guarded by God and not subjugated by another people. **3:** Job 4:5. **4:** In the original, “from calling your name I-Am” (Exodus 3:14). **6:** 2 Kings 8:10: “Thou shalt surely recover from this illness.” **7:** Joel 1:8. **8:** Isaiah 4:6: “There shall be a pavilion for a shadow from the heat and for a refuge and a covert”; Jonah 4:6. The final line alludes to the holiday of Sukkot (the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles).

## A PRAYER FOR RAIN AND SUSTENANCE

*Shirei Qodesh shel DaPiera*, #35. Acrostic: Within the opening line: *Shelomo*. Fleischer notes that the modern editor of DePiera's liturgical poems, S. Bernstein, separated elements that were originally parts of a *shivata* for rain, or a prayer in time of drought. (The *shivata* is a shortened form of the ancient *qerova*—which is a general term applied to all the composite hymns that ornament the 'amida, the "standing prayer" at the heart of the liturgy.) This short poem was part of that larger sequence. The *shivata* and *qerova* were rarely taken up by the Spanish poets, with only Ibn Abitor, Ibn Gabirol, and Avraham Ibn Ezra having attempted them two to three centuries years earlier. Just what led DePiera to try his hand at this form remains a mystery. (Only parts of his poem are extant.) He may have written the prayer on demand, most likely at the request of the Ben Lavi family, which was close to the crown; the latter may have placed its request before the Ben Lavis. The prayers of the Jews in this respect were accorded unique power in Spain. This was also a way for the Jews to participate in what was a fairly widespread Catholic religious phenomenon (*Shevet Yehuda* [Hanover, 1874], p. 109). **Line 1:** Literally, "of the nations" (or "gentiles")—*Melekh hagoyim*, i.e., the Catholic monarch of Aragon.

## THIS YEAR'S WINE: 1417

*HaShira*, #428:1. **Heading:** In the month of Shvat (January) I completed this poem, which I made in Monzón about the bad wines of the year 1417, and this is what I said." This is the latest recorded date for the poet. Each distich of the Hebrew (every other line of the English) contains a scriptural allusion or citation concerning wine and ends with the word itself. **Line 2:** Hosea 7:5: "The princes make him sick with the heat of wine"; Deuteronomy 32:33: "Their wine is the venom of serpents. **4:** Isaiah 28:1: "Woe to the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, . . . which is on the head of the fat valley of them that are smitten down with wine!" **6:** Numbers 6:3: "The vow of a Nazarite . . . he shall abstain from wine and strong drink." **8:** Leviticus 23:13: "The drink-offering shall be of wine." **10:** Joel 4:3: "And they have . . . sold a girl for wine and have drunk." **12–14:** Proverbs 23:20, 30: "Be not among the winebibbers [those who guzzle wine] . . . They that tarry long at the wine." **16:** Isaiah 28:7: "The priest and the prophet reel through strong drink, they are confused because of wine." **18:** The poet is quoting the lying preacher of Micah 2:11, who says: "I will preach unto thee of wine and of strong drink." Jeremiah 23:26. **20:** Genesis 49:12: "His eyes shall be red with wine."

## VIDAL BENVENISTE

Shelomo Ben Lavi's grandson Yosef Ben Lavi was also known as Yosef (Vidal) Ben Benveniste Ben Lavi, and has therefore often been confused with his friend Vidal Benveniste, our poet. Yosef was Shelomo DePiera's student in the Ben Lavi

household, where poetry was one of the subjects in the curriculum. A gifted student in all respects, especially in the field of philosophy, Yosef was also a talented poet and often exchanged poems with his teacher and in time with his friend Vidal, who, to confuse matters further, may have been Yosef's brother-in-law, but was also perhaps a distant blood relative. He too studied with Shelomo DePiera, though he was not nearly as close to him.

#### ADVICE FROM WIVES

*Shirei Benveniste*, ed. T. Vardi (see DePiera's "After Conversion," above), #75; *HaShira*, #445. Precisely the opposite attitude toward a wife's advice is presented in the epilogue to *Melitzat 'Efer veDina*, where the repulsive old man, 'Efer, is rebuked by the narrator for not having listened to his wife, who in that tale's allegorical scheme represents "the wise, restorative soul which gives man success." **Line 3:** Psalms 133:1. **4:** Ezekiel 16:34.

#### WHAT GIRLS WANT

*Melitzat 'Efer veDina*, ed. Matti Huss (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 165–66, lines 169–72. The poem is in the first-person singular. **Line 1:** I.e., they run after males to mate. Jeremiah 2:23. **2:** Job 31:7. **8:** The verb that has been translated as "lie" can also mean "kneel," which of course would imply another sort of sexual encounter. However, in this context the verb is used as it is in Judges 5:27, where Sisera lies dead, fallen at the feet of Ya'el, who has slain him. *Yebamot* 103a, however, makes the sexual associations of the biblical verse clear: "That profligate [Sisera] had seven sexual connections on that day; for it is said, 'Between her feet he sunk, he fell, he lay; at her feet he sunk, he fell; where he sunk, there he fell down dead.'" The reference is clearly to the missionary position; oral sex was, it seems, not common, and certainly not written about in poems. The Talmud treats it in passing; see *Nedarim* 20a and b: "R. Johanan b. Dahabai said: The Ministering Angels told me four things: People are born lame because they [their parents] overturned their table [i.e., practiced 'unnatural' cohabitation]; dumb, because they kiss 'that place'. . . . R. Johanan said: The above is the view of R. Johanan b. Dahabai: but our Sages said . . . a man may do whatever he pleases with his wife: A parable: Meat which comes from the abattoir may be eaten, salted, roasted, cooked or seethed; so with fish from the fishmonger." (See also James Bellamy, "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature," in *Society and the Sexes*, ed. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot [Malibu, 1979], p. 34.)

#### TO A POET-FRIEND TOO MUCH IN NEED

*Shirei Benveniste*, #15. Vidal Benveniste's response to Shelomo DePiera's poem after his conversion ("After Conversion," above). The poem answers DePiera

directly, picking up on the aspects of the scriptural allusions around which Shelomo's poem pivots and using them against DePiera, thus rendering the retort doubly harsh and effective. As we've seen, this is not the first time Benveniste addressed his former teacher with harshness of this sort, and his attitude to Shelomo following the conversion wasn't necessarily shared by all their friends. Moshe Abbaas, for example, was far more understanding and gentle, and he sought to coax his friend back into the fold. **Heading:** "Don Vidal's reply to him: "Because of the oppressor's wrath, the doors to my song have closed, but now I'm forced by the poet, whose sins against his soul have come to my ears, and so the doorposts to the thoughts of my heart have been shaken and I have been moved to compose, for I will not suffer fools or men of iniquity." **Lines 1–2:** Isaiah 23:15 (see DePiera's poem). **3–4:** Hosea 4:16. **5–6:** Isaiah 23:15–16; Genesis 42:17. **7–8:** Isaiah 23:16; Judges 5:12; *Avodah Zarah* 17a: "Every harlot who allows herself to be hired will at the end have to hire." The Hebrew also has a particularly cruel twist, as the word *niskeret* (hired) involves the shifting of a single letter in the key word of DePiera's poem: *nizkeret* (recalled/remembered).

#### POEMS FOR A DOE IN A GARDEN

These three poems are taken from a series (of five) that are prefaced by a prose passage describing the awakening of love. One day, the poet notes, he saw a young woman whose eyes were like a dove's and who charmed all who saw her. She held him in her spell and led him toward "sin[ning] with his skin [flesh]." She was "as beautiful as the clear moon and like the brightness of the horizon, her words split hearts, and she drowned her listeners in the sea of her love, and overcame the young men of Israel. . . . And so when I saw her I fell madly in love with her, and I sang her praises night and day."

##### I.

*Shirei Benveniste*, #66.

##### II.

*Shirei Benveniste*, #67. **Line 4:** Judges 5:31.

##### III.

*Shirei Benveniste*, #68; *HaShira*, #449:2, lines 6–11. This poem also appears in *Melitzat 'Efer veDina*, with some variants, and in a different context (lines 27–29). Huss comments there that the poem presents an ironic (nearly grotesque) take on the classical Andalusian erotic poem—as in the context of the *maqama* it is obvious to all that the young woman has no desire whatsoever to "trap" the repulsive old man in her "net." On the contrary, he is the one who wants to do the trapping. It is also unusual that the doe calls out to the man. **Line 4:** Literally, "the lining of my heart (*segor libi*)"; cf. Ibn Janaah's *Sefer HaShorashim*, p. 333. **5:** Literally, "and bring me up with its hook."

## A THANK YOU NOTE

*Shirei Benveniste*, #77. To Ben-Lavi. The image of rain from the clouds is a conventional representation of the patron's bounty. In this case, however, it appears to be an expression of the poet's skill as a writer (and possibly calligrapher). Benveniste seems not to have had (or needed) a patron, and his poetry contains none of the conventional gestures of patron and patronized.

## THINK ABOUT THIS

*Shirei Benveniste*, #82. **Line 1:** Proverbs 10:22. **4:** Ecclesiastes 5:12: "There is a grievous evil which I have seen . . . riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt."

## BEYOND WORDS

*Shirei Benveniste*, #88. **Line 2:** Isaiah 34:11: "He shall stretch over it the line of confusion and the plummet of emptiness." **3:** Literally, "without language, they thought they'd find the purest songs."

## MY SON, BEFORE YOU WERE BORN

*Shirei Benveniste*, #71. One of four elegies written after the death of his son, Shelomo, whom he addressed by name in one of the longer poems. The tone of this recalls HaNagid's elegies for his brother, Isaac. **Line 1:** Genesis 25:22. **3:** 1 Samuel 1:27. **5–6:** Literally, "Now I would have preferred death to having given birth to you." Cf. Psalms 2:7.

## TO ONE WHO SAID HIS HEART FOR VERSE WAS ADAMANT

*Shirei Benveniste*, #91. **Line 2:** Literally, "don't turn to devouring words," as in Psalms 52:6–7: "Thou lovest all devouring [pernicious] words, the deceitful [treacherous] tongue. . . . So God will tear thee down for good, will break thee." **3–4:** Jeremiah 17:1; Ezekiel 3:9: "As an adamant, harder than flint have I made my forehead"; Jeremiah 23:29.

## CLARITY

*Shirei Benveniste*, #116. This minimalist gem stands in direct contrast to the conventional imagery of the Andalusian wine poem, which emphasizes the contrast between the cup (white, cool) and the wine (red, warm) inside it. Of note is the balance between all elements of the transparency the poet conjures—imagistic, tonal, and grammatical. That said, there is an Arabic precedent for it, in a poem by Abu Nuwas.

## WHAT GOES AROUND COMES . . .

*Shirei Benveniste*, #128. **Line 2:** Psalms 79:12. **3:** Isaiah 44:18. **4:** Ecclesiastes 5:10.

## THE TONGUE SPEAKS AND THE HAND RECORDS

*Shirei Benveniste*, #9. This poem was addressed and sent to Shelomo DePiera. It responds to a poem of DePiera's in which he suggests that Don Vidal has been slow in responding to a previous poem of his because his (Benveniste's) powers have waned. A letter follows the poem. Like many Hebrew qasidas in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, this one employs the circular structure in which the poem's opening line is repeated at the end. Scheindlin suggests that this new element of the qasida form may have arisen in Christian Spain when the open-ended classical qasida form was no longer familiar to audiences and had come to seem "formless." As the audience required some sort of marker indicating the end of the poem, this new device was called into service. (See Scheindlin, "The Hebrew Qasida in Spain," in *Qasida Poetry in Asia and Africa*, ed. S. Sperl and C. Shackel [Leiden, 1996], pp. 128–135). Whatever its origin, it became extremely common. For another example of it in this anthology, see Bonafed's "World Gone Wrong." **Lines 3–4:** Isaiah 2:21; Psalms 74:6. **5–6:** Deuteronomy 20:19; Job 38:36. **7–8:** Isaiah 51:9; 51:1–2. **9–10:** 1 Kings 7:29; Proverbs 26:13. **11–12:** The translation skips thirty-four Hebrew lines to the last part of the poem and Benveniste's central complaint. In the first sixteen Hebrew lines not translated, the poet praises his former teacher at length and in hyperbolic fashion for his erstwhile ways with the language; for the next eighteen he questions DePiera's choice of himself (Benveniste) to replace him as leader of the group of poets called *'Adat Nognim*, saying that Yosef Ben Lavi would have been the more appropriate choice, as he was the next in line and older than Benveniste. DePiera's judgment is clouded, he concludes. The translation picks up at line 39 of the original, with the closing section of the poem, in which Benveniste insults his former teacher. **Psalms 40:13; 1 Samuel 12:33. 13–14:** Numbers 32:7. **15–16:** Psalms 140:6. **19–20:** Psalms 6:8. **23–24:** Literally, "My poem (or muse) is late and has been delayed." **Psalms 94:17. 25–26:** Jeremiah 13:10. **29–30:** Job 41:11, 31. **31–32:** Deuteronomy 32:22. **35–36:** 1 Samuel 1:16. **39:** The Hebrew text is problematic, but appears to read *kebeitza o kekoteret*, alluding to Mishna *Orlah* 2:5 and the Jerusalem Talmud, *Baba Metzi'a* 7:4. **45–46:** Job 8:12, 15:32. Literally, "my spirit is like a lute."

## SHELOMO HALEVI (PABLO DE SANTA MARIA)

Shmu'el HaNagid and his son Yehosef were buried in the old cemetery near the Elvira gate, at a site that was marked and known to Granadans for several

hundred years after their death, but we no longer know where that site is. (See *Toldot* [1995], p. 216, n. 170, and sources there, and Ibn al-Khateeb's *Al-Ihaatah fi Akhbaar Ghanaatah*.) For the information regarding the burial site of Pablo de Santa Maria, I am grateful to Professor Salvador Andrés Ordax, of the University of Valladolid, who sent on maps and explanations regarding the burial site and its history, including the relevant sections of B. Palacios's *Historia de la ciudad de Burgos* (1729), pp. 435–51; Professor Andrés Ordax's own volume, *Burgos Cathedral* (Leon, n. d.), was also extremely helpful. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi (in *Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism: The Iberian and the German Models*, Leo Baeck Memorial Lecture 26, [New York, 1982]) quotes the Spanish historian Americo Castro on the Jewish convert Pablo Santa Maria's influence: "From him stem all the theologians, jurists, and historians named Santa Maria, whose works fill fifteenth-century letters with distinction" (*The Structure of Spanish History* [Princeton, 1954], p. 537). For more on Shelomo/Pablo see Baer's *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2:139–50. On the talmudic injunction relating to drinking, see *Megillah* 7b.

#### MEMORY'S WINE

*HaShira*, #436. The poem is a parody of a Sephardic liturgical form, the *mi kamokha* (who is like unto you), which surveys the history of the world from creation to the Exodus from Egypt. The parody surveys the history of wine from the time of Noah to the present. **Line 1:** Proverbs 23:31. **4:** Gifts of food are usually given on Purim, especially to the poor. **9–10:** Because wine was not known in the generation of Enosh, the people sinned and were punished by the flood. Genesis 4:22; 5:9. **11–12:** Noah—who is known in rabbinic literature as the World's Foundation—planted the first vine (Genesis 9:20); if not for that, another flood would have come upon humankind. **14:** Genesis 24:42. A feast is generally held on the afternoon of the holiday. **18:** Ecclesiastes 2:3: "I searched in my heart how to pamper [tempt] myself with wine."

#### SHELOMO BONAFED

It is worth noting that the man who defended the integrity of the Jewish community with vehemence throughout his life was also known for his scandalous love affairs with much younger and not-necessarily-Jewish women. The stories around the poems he wrote about his love life are, however, more interesting than the poems themselves. They include one case in which the young woman's father ends up shipping the girl off to Sicily to protect her from the older Bonafed's wiles and grasp, and others in which he mentions the names of his beloveds. Malka/Reina, for example, rejected him, preferring the company of younger men.

## WORLD GONE WRONG

*HaShira*, #453. **Heading:** “One of the country’s finest was deprived of all his property and possessions. His world was turned upside down, and changed like clay under the seal [Job 38:14] of Time, and where his lines had fallen in pleasant places, the sentence of days turned them to poison [wormwood]; for the meek of the age have become like the stars on high, and every fool now walks through the valley. And therefore I sent this poem to the exalted Anvidal Bonsegnor in Solsona, [having written it] when I was still young.” The poem is a classic example of the topos of the inverted world and seems to be referring not only to the individual loss experienced by the poem’s addressee but to the Spanish-Jewish community as a whole, which—in the wake of the events of 1391—was administered by unqualified and corrupt individuals from the working class (among them, weavers and leatherworkers). This, as Bonafed saw it, was contrary to the natural order of things. Bonafed wrote another poem, much later in his career, where he makes use of the same motif in attacking the corrupt members of the Saragossan Jewish community (see “A Vision of Ibn Gabirol,” below). The topos of the inverted world was traditionally employed both to levy criticism at an existing social order and to lament change to a given order. (See E. Gutwirth, “The ‘World Upside Down’ in Hebrew,” *Orientalia Suecana* 30 (1981): 141–47. This topos was especially popular in fifteenth-century Spanish literature. **Line 1:** Literally, “See, horses streak,” or, “Look, horses streak.” The poem opens with what Gutwirth calls “a series of *impossibilia*, as demanded by the conventions of the genre.” **6:** Genesis 31:36. **9–10:** The impossible and/or unnatural situations of lines 1–8 are now revealed to be analogous to the unnatural state of things in the poet’s world just now, where the “lower orders” of craftsmen have become too big for their britches and the community’s leaders have proven themselves unworthy. Proverbs 2:15; Job 35:9. **11:** Psalms 31:13. **19–20:** Proverbs 26:18: “As a madman who casteth firebrands [sparks] . . . so is the man who deceiveth his neighbors.” **23–24:** The Hebrew plays on the word *masekhet*, which means both “weave” (or “warp and woof”) and “tractate”—as in a tractate of the Talmud. The implication is that he considers his work as sacred as Scripture. **25–26:** The tanner is known for the foul smell of the materials he works with and is generally considered repulsive. *Baba Batra* 16b: “Alas for him whose occupation is that of a tanner.” **27–28:** Proverbs 18:23: “The answers of the rich are impudent [harsh].” **36:** Psalms 50:11. **37–38:** The betrayal of those who converted to Christianity. Isaiah 31:6. **42:** Exodus 29:2. **48:** Isaiah 35:6. **51:** Cherub—here a term of endearment and admiration. **52–53:** *Tosefta Bikurim* 2:16. Regarding the litany of craftsmen as part of a natural order gone wrong, E. Gutwirth points out that by the fifteenth century “contempt for the lower orders” of society, including manual laborers, craftsmen, and more, had become fairly widespread in elite Jewish circles. Gutwirth notes, for example, Profiat Duran’s 1408 work on Hebrew language, in which the writer compares the days of Yehuda HaLevi and his own, praising the wealthy Jewish patrons who commissioned richly decorated manu-

scripts with thick, clear letters. But that, he notes, was in “those days, when they used to engage in Torah study in their thousands and tens of thousands, so much so that the artisans in their spare time did nothing but study, but nowadays, that there are more books than writers or readers, the artisans in their spare time . . . pursue vanity going to play dice, and the cause has vanished” (“Contempt for the Lower Orders in XV<sup>th</sup> Century Hispano-Jewish Thought,” *Miscelanea de estudios y hebraicos* 29–30 [1981]). Manual labor is esteemed in classical rabbinic thought; the “contempt” here derives, Gutwirth notes, from its separation from study. (For another take on this, see Ibn Alahdab’s “Renaissance Man.”) 53–54: I.e., if I ever abandon you, then the laws of nature will truly have been violated—not only by way of analogy, as in the opening. At the beginning of the poem these impossible situations are presented as metaphorical; at the close of the poem the impossibility is literal. That is, horses do *not* streak through the heart of the seas, and I will never abandon you. It is also possible, of course, to read the last line subversively and see an unconscious element (of disloyalty) in the friendship.

#### A VISION OF IBN GABIROL

*HaPulmus shel Shelomo Bonafed beNikhbedei Saragossa*, ed. H. Schirmann (*Qovetz 'al-Yad* 4 [1946]:14), #4. **Heading:** “And another [poem] while I dwelled for a while with the pathetic Jews of Saragossa, who in their perversion made for themselves a golden calf and exchanged their glory for the likeness of kine, an evil man full of guile . . . one named Yosef Yeshu‘a . . . who came from Sicily and didn’t know how to disperse knowledge. This people that walked in darkness honored him with their silver and gold, and in setting him at their head they erred. And when I saw that this would come to a bitter end, I came out among them—for all they had was being lost, and fleeing before the Lord. And after I came to Belchite, the Lord happened to put before me the rhymes of the sage Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, which are more precious than gold, to rebuke this wicked community for having persecuted him long ago. The poem begins ‘My throat is parched with pleading.’ Then I awoke and said I will write like him, and make known throughout Israel their wickedness and the evil within the souls of these sinners. And after its likeness and image, and with the same meter, I composed this poem, which I sent to the sage Don Gonsalo Ibn Lavi, may his soul rest in Eden, and this is what I said.” The poem is part of an extended series of epistles and short poems that Bonafed composed while in “exile” in the town of Belchite (roughly twenty-five miles southeast of Saragossa), railing against the nouveau-riche leaders of the Saragossan Jewish community, whom he considered coarse and wholly unworthy of their position. It was they who had let themselves be misled by the Sicilian rabbi Yeshu‘a, whom Bonafed considered a pernicious boor and a fraud. Ibn Gabirol’s poem is translated in full above (see, “On Leaving Saragossa”). Bonafed’s poem, which is of a lesser order altogether—though not without power—is translated only in part (lines 19–37 of a seventy-line poem in Hebrew). **Line 4:** Habakkuk

3:11. **8:** Isaiah 45:24. **9:** The poet's full name is Shelomo Ben Reuben Bonafed. **23:** Both are "Shelomo."

#### WHEREVER YOU GO

A. Gross, "HaMeshorer Shelomo Bonafed," in *Sefer Zikaron leEfraim Talmedge* (Haifa, 1993), Appendix, p. 49, #1 ("an telkhi o tidrekhi iggeret"). The poem is one of several that the poet wrote to friends and colleagues who had converted. As Avraham Gross points out, these postconversion poems show just how central (Hebrew) poetry was to the group; it continued to bind them and exert its hold over them even after they'd been baptized. In lines 1–14 the poet is addressing the letter written by his baptized friend. **Lines 4–8:** Numbers 5:12; 1 Kings 14:3; Ezra 9:3–4; Proverbs 7:6. **12:** In Hebrew a pun: one of the constellations is known as "The Moth"—i.e., the surface of your letter is accomplished and impressive, but within it lies something destructive. **15–16:** Rimoq's letter itself is speaking here; it mentions the prefiguration of Jesus in Scripture, though the tone Bonafed lends the letter here is deeply ironic. Isaiah 63:1; Proverbs 9:14; Song of Songs 5:10. **17:** Proverbs 8:30. **20:** Isaiah 9:5, a verse that Christians read in Christological terms. **31–32:** The figure is hyperbolic, as though the spirit of poetry in him were the same spirit that inspired Deborah to sing and Barak to fight (Judges 4–5).

#### YITZHAQ ALAHDAB

Sicily became part of the House of Aragon after the great revolt against French colonization of 1282, when Peter III of Aragon became Peter I of Sicily. Following his reign, the island was ruled by a succession of Aragonese monarchs until 1412, when the crowns of Sicily and Aragon alike passed to Ferdinand I and the island came under direct Spanish rule. Fleischer sees Alahdab as a successor to Shmu'el Ibn Sasson and Shem Tov Arduziel, and values him as well for the popular aspects of his work. Eliezer Gutwirth has written about the poet's focus on the "lower orders" or "trades" as an emblematic interest of a developing Hispano-Jewish bourgeois ideology (evident also in Moshe Natan's *Issues of Life*). The topos was increasingly prevalent in the European literature of the time. See E. Gutwirth, "Hispano-Jewish Bourgeois Ideology," in *Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Bernard Dev Cooperman (Delaware, 1998), pp. 154ff.

#### INFLATION

*Shirei Yitzhaq Ben Shelomo Alahdab*, ed. Ora Ra'anana (Lod, 1988), #38. **Lines 1–2:** *Pesahim* 102b. **4:** Deuteronomy 22:8, involving a pun on the word for "blood," *damim*, which can also in this plural form mean "money."

## ANOTHER FLEA

*Shirei Alahdab*, #39.

**Line 4:** Or, “who bites the lion, whose blood he savors . . . and before their viziers show no favors.”

## SECURITY

*Shirei Alahdab*, #36.

## THE ELDERLY ASKED IF THE DOCTORS

*Shirei Alahdab*, #45. **Line 2:** Ecclesiastes 1:15.

## AS SORCERERS SPREAD

*Shirei Alahdab*, #47. **Line 4:** Literally, “oven and stove” (Leviticus 11:35), which in *Ta’anit* 30a, b is understood as “a humble position or station.”

## BEING POOR

*Shirei Alahdab*, #66.

## STATE OF THE ART; OR, POETRY WAILS

*Shirei Alahdab*, #5; *HaShira*, #434. **Line 5:** Exodus 31:6; Isaiah 3:3. **8:** I.e., as they stood guard over poetry’s standards. **9:** Shelomo Ibn Gabirol. Fleischer notes that HaNagid is conspicuously absent from the list of important poets; Alahdab most likely didn’t know of his work. **10:** For more on the notion of “sacred currency,” see the biographical introduction to Yosef Qimhi’s poems and my comments there on the nature of *sheqel haqodesh*. “Sacred currency” had double value; here “currency” implies his language generally and, perhaps, the content of his liturgical poems. **12:** Job 37:18. **19:** Hosea 13:16. **21:** Moshe and Avraham Ibn Ezra. **22:** Genesis 46:29. **23:** 2 Kings 2:12. **24:** 1 Samuel 18:4. **30:** Ezekiel 12:13. **31:** Exodus 32:18. **33–34:** I.e., they announce themselves loudly and conspicuously. Leviticus 22:24. **36:** Exodus 7:29, 12:34: “So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders”—i.e., everyone comes forth with what he has, whether or not the poems are ready and worthy.

## RENAISSANCE MAN

*Shirei Alahdab*, #13. In the original the poem is 177 lines long and contains thirty-six stanzas, including the introductory quatrain. They incorporate an alphabetical acrostic and, at the end, the acrostic *HaZaQ veEMaTZ* (be strong and

of good courage). **Line 8:** Job 39:20. **9:** 1 Samuel 17:5. **10:** Literally, “an archer”; Genesis 21:20. **13:** Leviticus 26:36. **15:** Jeremiah 29:5. **22:** Jeremiah 22:14. **23:** Literally, “towers and delightful imagery”; Isaiah 2:16. **24:** Judges 6:2: “dens which are in the mountains” (Hebrew uncertain). **25:** The translation skips six Hebrew stanzas and resumes at stanza 10, line 43, of the original. **35:** Stanza 12, line 53, of the Hebrew. **45:** Stanza 22, line 103, of the Hebrew. **55:** Stanza 35, line 168, of the Hebrew. **62:** Some read the Hebrew here as: “I’ve grown tired, but soon I’ll make my way to . . .” **64–65:** Literally, “Then it was known that without me, all was a fraud,/and without me [i.e., my input] no one could lift a hand.”

### MOSHE REMOS

Fleischer comments that the poem’s heading doesn’t mean that he was in fact executed the next day, but that—for some reason—the execution was delayed, with Remos adding the heading at a later point. (A comment by the Italian-Hebrew poet Moshe Rieti states that the execution did eventually take place, and it notes that Remos was buried outside Palermo, near the city wall.) Fleischer adds that Remos may well have had a European (and possibly folk) model in mind. Other famous later examples of poems written before execution, at least according to legend, are Chidiock Tichborne’s “Elegy” of 1586, Sir Walter Raleigh’s “The Pilgrimage,” and Andre Chénier’s late-eighteenth-century French poem from prison.

### LAST WORDS

*Hebrew Ethical Wills*, ed. I. Abrahams (Philadelphia, 1926), pp. 238–48 (excerpts, as listed below); some of the translated passages can be found in *HaShira*, #459. An acrostic repeating the letters of the poet’s name numerous times is woven through the poem. The Hebrew has no regular meter, and its quatrains rhyme *abab*, with the rhymes changing each quatrain. This quatrain form was quite popular in Hebrew medieval verse, though usually within a liturgical context; the secular use of it here is distinct. The excerpts here translate lines 1–12, 33–52, and 145–88 of the original. **Line 1:** Literally, “a learned man who seeks God.” **2:** Psalms 14:2, 53:3. **3:** Jeremiah 11:19. **5–8:** *Ze’er Anpin* and *Ba’al haHotem*—literally, “the small countenance” and “the one with the nose”: qabbalistic terms relating to divine anger and forbearance. **9–12:** These terms refer to the ten qabbalistic *sefirot*. **12:** Psalms 22:2. The translation skips twenty lines of the Hebrew at this point. **15:** Psalms 68:5; *Hagigah* 12b; *Guide to the Perplexed* 2. 4. **17:** Jeremiah 2:12: “Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this.” **19:** Lines 19–32 enumerate the signs of the zodiac, all of which the poet mimics in his martyrdom. **27:** 1 Kings 12:11. **32:** The translation skips ninety lines of the Hebrew at this point. **36:** Jeremiah 22:19:

“He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.” **45:** Isaiah 9:4: “For every boot stamped with fierceness.” **46:** *Genesis Rabbah* 85:2. **50:** Or, “to give the heathens a beaker of reeling” (Isaiah 51:17). “Heathens” here is used in the biblical sense, indicating any “unclean” person, a non-Jew. **55:** Rabbi Akiva (c. 50–135 C.E.), one of the most famous sages of the talmudic period, who died at the hands of Roman torturers and approached his martyrdom as an opportunity to fulfill the commandments of the Shema’. *Berakhot* 61b: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul . . . even if you must pay for it with your life.” **56:** Nehemiah 9:33. **60:** Literally, “I give my portion to the Living Rock, and ‘the dead beast shall be his’” (Exodus 21:34). **64:** Lamentations 3:1. **66:** 1 Samuel 15:32. **69:** Ecclesiastes 12:13. **70:** The standard, ancient form of confession. *Yoma* 87b: “if he had said: ‘Truly, we have sinned,’ no more is necessary. . . . this was the main confession.” **76:** Daniel 12:13; 1 Samuel 25:29: “The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord”—i.e., in the care of the Lord.

#### ‘ELI BEN YOSEF [HAVILLIO?]

The attribution of the poems to Havillio was made by Yosef Tubi, who also commented on the unusual modesty of this epigram.

#### WHO SOARS

“‘Eli Ben Yosef (Havillio?)—Meshorer ‘Ivri min haDor haAharon biSefard,” ed. Yosef Tubi, *Dapim leMehqar beSifrut* 7 (1991): 268, #5. **Line 1:** Judges 5:26. **4:** Job 20:24. **6:** Psalms 58:9; Deuteronomy 32:22.

#### MOSHE IBN HABIB

Like the rest of the Jewish population in the western part of Iberia, Portugal’s Jewish communities appear to have been small and impoverished at least up until near the end of the eleventh century, and we have little in the way of any records relating to their scholars and writers (Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 2: 204; and A. Schippers, “Moshe Ibn Habib, Migrant and Poet,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 35/2 [2001]: 172–83). An independent Jewish community developed in Portugal over time, reinforced by the influx of tens of thousands of Spanish exiles after the Expulsion, who were given temporary asylum there before being expelled in 1497. As Yosef Haim Yerushalmi writes: “Portuguese Jewry . . . was cut off in its prime, perhaps even on the verge of greatness” (“A Jewish Classic in the Portuguese Language,” intro. to *Consolação às Tribulações de Israel* [Lisbon, 1989], p. 24). Fleischer, in *Toldot* (1997), says that he left in 1497. Abravanel’s poem is translated in

full and discussed by Raymond Scheindlin in “Judah Abravanel to His Son,” *Judaism*, 1992, and Constable, *Medieval Iberia*, pp. 357–63. The preface to *Darkhei No’am* reads, in part: “And I am Moshe . . . who has been humbled by time’s trials and tribulations, which have uprooted me and my family, and the fighting surrounds me, and no one comes or goes, and I am here in Bitonto, for such it seems is my destiny, and harder than all is my poverty, for these three have given me over to this hole and cranny, far from the country of my birth, and the home of my father and my uncles.” The three types of poetry that Habib discusses are drawn directly from the Arabic philosopher Al-Faraabi, who says that poetry is “of six kinds, three of which are praised and three blamed”; in terms closer to the Hebrew than those used by the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (which are quoted in the biographical introduction here), Adele Berlin describes the three types that Habib mentions as: “1) poems intended for the improvement of the intellect; 2) poems intended for the restoration of equilibrium when ‘accidents of the soul,’ such as anger and pride, threaten to overcome it; and 3) poems intended for the elevation of the soul from ‘lesser accidents,’ such as fear, pain, and cowardice” (Berlin, *The Bible through Medieval Eyes*, p. 116). The other three types of poetry that Habib says shouldn’t be discussed involve the negation of the three positive types (“the opposites of the three which are praised”). See al-Faraabi, *Fusuul al-Madani: Aphorisms of the Statesman*, ed. and trans. D. M. Dunlop (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 49–50. See also M. B. Amzalak, *Portuguese Hebrew Grammars and Grammmarians*, (Lisbon, 1928), pp. 10–12; R. Feingold, “‘HaSiman haYehudi’ bePortugal,” *Pe’amim* 51 (1992): 70–80.

#### ACCOUNT

*Darkhei No’am ‘im Marpei Lashon*, ed. V. Heidenheim, (Roedelheim, 1806), p. 12a; Schirmann, *HaShira*, #463a. **Line 1–2:** Ecclesiastes 5:10. **3–4:** The Hebrew *nihamti* is glossed by Schirmann as “regret”—at the sight of the flames coming forth from the account. The flames suggest what awaits the speaker.

#### YOU COME TO THE HOUSE OF GOD

*Darkhei No’am*, p. 17b. A homonym poem in the original. **Heading:** “About those who come to pray and bring their mouths but not their hearts.” **6:** Exodus 30:23.

#### SA’ADIA IBN DANAAAN

The Jewish population of Granada is discussed by David Wasserstein in “Jewish Elites” (see introduction to this anthology, note 12). In the city itself (as opposed to the entire kingdom), there were by this time a mere five hundred and fifty Jews. He notes there that Ibn Danaan’s date of death is listed in R. Arié, *L’Espagne musulmane*

*au temps des Nasrides, 1232–1492* (Paris, 1973), p. 336 (and n. 2), as December 11, 1492—that is, a few months after the Expulsion. Others list his date of death as 1505 or after 1505 (see E. Hazan, *HaShira Ha'Ivrit beTzafon Afriqa* [Jerusalem, 1995], pp. 197–200), and the later date makes more sense. Hazan, whose anthology includes a longer liturgical composition and a secular poem about misers, describes Ibn Danaan's style as "light and winning," and he notes that in addition to the poet's gentle and mischievous epigrams, he also wrote scores of both secular and liturgical poems. Davidson's *Thesaurus of Medieval Hebrew Poetry* (1933; New York, 1970), 4:455, lists sixty-two poems. See also A. Saenz-Badillos and J. Targarona Borrás, "Poemas de Se'adyah Ibn Danaan," ed. and trans. J. Targarona Borrás, *Sefarad* 46 (1990): 449ff. For prose and several other poems by Ibn Danaan, see also D. 'Ovadia, *Fas veHokhmeiha* (Jerusalem 1979), 2: 1–91.

## ENMITY SMOLDERS

*Melekheth HaShir*, ed. Y. Neubauer (Frankfurt, 1865), p. 10.

## HORDES OF READERS

*Melekheth HaShir*, p. 8. **Line 3:** The sons of the biblical 'Ever, from which the word 'Ivrim (Hebrews) derives. Genesis 10:21: "And unto Shem, the father of all the children of Eber. . . ."

## MIXED MESSENGER

*Melekheth HaShir*, p. 10; *HaShira*, #462:2. While this poem takes up the standard trope of the dangerous woman and her smooth talk (with the final two lines providing a metaphorical explanation for the mixed message the woman sends), it might—like many of Ibn Danaan's poems of desire—also be seen from this late vantage point as an unconscious comment on the Arabized Hebrew poem itself. As such, it recalls Dunash's "Eden" of Scripture and the "paradise grove" of Arabic books. **Line 4:** Genesis 21:20: "And [Ishmael] became an archer."

## SHE TRAPPED ME

*Melekheth HaShir*, p. 8. **Lines 1–2:** Proverbs 9:17.

## CHIASMUS FOR A DOE

*Melekheth HaShir*, p. 8; *HaShira*, #462:1.



## ‡ GLOSSARY ‡

*The following notes relate only to terms mentioned in this anthology and are by no means exhaustive. Likewise, poems cited at the end of each entry illustrate the term under discussion but do not account for all the poems in this volume that demonstrate a given phenomenon.\**

**acrostic:** While the vast majority of liturgical poems were written to be presented on behalf of a congregation of worshipers, and not as the personal expression of the individual poet, poets regularly “signed” their hymns with acrostics registering their names. Usually these acrostics ran down the spine of the poem, with the first letter of each line spelling out the poet’s name. Sometimes the acrostic would include only the poet’s first name, while at other times the full name in a variety of permutations would appear. Alternatively, particularly in longer composite poems, the poets employed alphabetical acrostics in a variety of (sometimes quite elaborate) arrangements.

**adab:** A central term in classical Arabic—and, by extension, Hebrew—literature, *adab* connotes both learning in its fullness as a way of life and the signature style of the cultured person. It refers at once to disciplines of the mind and soul, good breeding, refinement, culture, and belles lettres. Similar to the Greek notion of *paideia*.

**ahava:** A *piyyut*, or liturgical poem, that was originally part of the *yotzer*, a longer sequence of liturgical poems composed to accompany the recitation of the Shema’ during the morning liturgy on Sabbaths and festivals. (*Yotzer* means “Creator” or “He who creates,” as in the first benediction leading up to the recitation of the Shema’: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Creator of the heavenly lights.”) In Spain, it appears that the *yotzer* broke apart and its units became independent genres. The *ahava* was recited before the second benediction anticipating the Shema’: “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who in love (*be’ahava*) hast chosen Thy people Israel.” Most of the Spanish *ahavot* are

\*Information for the glossary is drawn, for the most part, from Schirmann’s two-volume history (see p. xxii, this anthology); *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London/New York, 1998); Adonis, *Arabic Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham (Austin, 1990); Dan Pagis, *Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory: Moses Ibn Ezra and His Contemporaries* [Hebrew], (Jerusalem, 1970); Shulamit Elitzur, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain in the Middle Ages* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2004), vols. 1–3; *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. S. Jayyusi (Leiden, 1994); Michael Sells, *Desert Tracings* (Middletown, 1989); Neal Kozodoy, “Reading Medieval Hebrew Love Poetry,” *AJS Review* 2 (1977); Proverbs/Ecclesiastes, ed. R.B.Y. Scott, *The Anchor Bible* (New York, 1965); Suzanne Stetkevych, *Abu Tammam and the Poetics of the Abbasid Age* (Leiden, 1991); Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York, 1965/79); and Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death* (Philadelphia, 1986) and *The Gazelle* (Philadelphia, 1991).

strophic, rather than monorhymed, and they often incorporate elements from the Song of Songs. See Moshe Ibn Ezra's "Gold" and HaLevi's "A Doe Far from Home."

***badii'a***: An Arabic word that initially meant "something novel, original," but came to stand for a style of poetry. It derives from the root yielding, among many other things, the verb *abda'a* (to invent, to bring something new into creation) and one of the Islamic names for God, the Originator. In the history of Arabic literature, *badii'a* denotes the "new" poetry of the early Abbasid period (late eighth–early ninth century), one that employed more elaborate rhetorical figuration than did previous Arabic verse. In *Abu Tammam and the Poetics of the Abbasid Age* (Leiden 1991), Suzanne Stetkevych comments: "I would like to propose that *badii'a* poetry be defined not merely as the occurrence of this particular type of rhetorical device but rather that the *badii'a* style is first and foremost the intentional, conscious encoding of abstract meaning into metaphor. . . . The large number of . . . rhetorical devices in *badii'a* poetry is not a mere proliferation due to infatuation . . . but rather the product of a constant and ineluctable awareness of the logical and etymological relationship between words, and the intention to express this awareness" (pp. 8, 30). As the term "metaphysical" was originally a pejorative in the history of English poetry, so the root *b-d-'a* in Arabic yields the word for heresy (*bid'ah*), and Arabic literary history records very mixed feelings about the modern poets' inventiveness and break with tradition. Ibn Qutayba says that Muslim Ibn al-Waliid (d. 823) was the first Arab poet to employ the style, "the first to make meanings subtle and speech delicate" (Adonis, *Arab Poetics*, p. 50). Moshe Ibn Ezra referred to Ibn Gabirol as the first Hebrew poet to adopt the *badii'a* approach. Elements of it, however, are central to much of the Hebrew poetry composed in Andalusia. See Ibn Gabirol's "The Garden," Moshe Ibn Ezra's "A Shadow," Ibn Hasdai's "The Qasida," and HaLevi's "On Friendship and Time" and "Heart at Sea."

***baqasha***: There are two kinds of *baqashot* (liturgical poems of petition for the forgiveness of sins). The first is a long, comprehensive composition in powerfully cadenced nonmetrical lines that often rhyme. The second type, which appears to be an Andalusian phenomenon, is a shorter or medium-length monorhymed poem that usually repeats the poem's opening hemistich at the end. For the first type, see Ibn Gabirol's *Kingdom's Crown*; for the second, see Ibn Gabirol's "Before My Being" and HaLevi's "Lord, [All My Desire]."

**complaint, poems of**: The borders of this genre in Hebrew are not well defined. Generally speaking, poems of complaint are cast in the first person and reflect the poet's specific circumstances. The poem might treat a patron, an enemy, a disappointing friend or family member, a community as a whole, or even Fate or Time itself—but the perspective will always be personal and limited to the speaker. Poems of complaint often combine elements and strategies from a number of other genres, such as invective, boasting, rebuke, description,

contemplation, or wisdom, and so forth. See Ibn Gabirol's "On Leaving Saragossa" (and "My Words Are Driven" in Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*), Moshe Ibn Ezra's "The Dove" and "Why Does Time Hound Me So," Todros Abu-lafia's poems from prison, and Avraham Ibn Ezra's "A Cloak," "Fortune's Stars," and "How It Is."

**contemplative verse (wisdom poetry):** While Hebrew contemplative verse is in many ways modeled on the contemplative poetry of Arabic literature, the biblical tradition of wisdom literature in Hebrew also informs this genre, whose distinguishing feature is its universality. Other genres might treat a given moment (of a battle, at a party, in love, after a death), blending elements of the actual and the ideal, the personal and the conventional; but contemplative poems treat existence itself and speak from the perspective of Wisdom, which in this medieval scheme is suprapersonal and objective. Just as the biblical Book of Proverbs was used for instruction by Solomon the sage (who didn't necessarily write the proverbs there), so too the contemplative verse of medieval Hebrew Spain presents not so much personal insight as "instructional materials for the cultivation of personal morality and practical wisdom" (R.B.Y. Scott, Proverbs, *Anchor Bible*, introduction). It involves, in other words, a body of knowledge that would help one in the situations of living. Their objectivity notwithstanding, however, contemplative poems sometimes incorporate explicitly personal elements, which serve as a concrete illustration of the universal conclusion to be drawn from them. See HaNagid's "I Quartered the Troops for the Night," "The Market," and nearly all of his poems from *Ben Mishle* and *Ben Qohelet* (which make up the final third of the section devoted to him here), Ibn Gabirol's "If You'd Live among Men" and "Heart's Hollow," Moshe Ibn Ezra's "Ivory Palaces" and "The World," Yedaya HaPenini's "The World Is a Raging Sea," and later selections from the proverbs of Qimhi, and Moshe Natan.

**convivencia:** A term coined by modern Spanish scholars to refer to the culture of coexistence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews in both northern and southern Spain during the Middle Ages. The term itself means, literally, "dwelling together" and does not necessarily imply the sort of tolerance that we associate with coexistence today. Rather, as Thomas Glick writes, it "carries connotations of mutual interpenetration and creative influence, even as it also embraces the phenomena of mutual friction, rivalry, and suspicion." While religious communities were entirely distinct, and while political power was almost never shared, the marketplace and arena of culture brought the various ethnic groups together in a variety of fruitful ways. Medieval coexistence in Spain referred, then, to "a field of interaction" that was based on a deep-seated ethnic hierarchy involving protected and second-class citizens. In Muslim Spain these protected citizens (or *dhimmi*s) were Christian and Jewish; in Christian Spain they included tolerated but often oppressed Jews and, to a lesser extent, Muslims. In both cases the situation was volatile, and political

change often brought with it serious danger to minority populations. At its best, the culture gave Jews greater religious, social, economic, and intellectual freedom than they knew in any other medieval (non-Muslim) society; at its worst, it led to heavy taxation and serious oppression. When the bottom fell out of it, forced conversion, emigration, and slaughter weren't long in coming. Its limitations notwithstanding, *convivencia* has been described as the defining issue in the history of al-Andalus, and it resulted in a major renaissance of Arabic and Hebrew literature and learning, and in an early flowering of Spanish culture. See also note 70 to the introduction.

**descriptive verse:** Descriptive verse (*wasf* in Arabic) was one of the four categories of poetry that the medieval Arabic poet was expected to control—the other three being the boast (*fakhr*), the invective (*hijaa'*), and the elegy (*marthiya*). Probably deriving from the descriptions of the abandoned campsite and beloved in the ancient qasida's erotic prelude, and of animals and landscape in the journey section, or *rahiil*, it evolved into a genre of its own in Abbasid Baghdad and later in Spain. The tradition in Arabic was highly developed, with poets often devoting entire collections to elaborate treatments of single subjects, such as hunting animals, kinds of flowers, and specific objects. The Hebrew tradition tended to confine itself to a few central courtly topics: the garden, wine, nature in its more cultivated state, writing, beautiful young women and men, palace architecture and atmosphere, and the like. The riddle, too, was considered a kind of descriptive poem. While one might initially be inclined to take the genre of *wasf* poetry lightly—since it involves “mere” description—in fact an argument could be made for seeing this genre as, in some instances, central to the poetry of the period. To take but one example: as the garden is the place where members of the court society meet, and where visual, verbal, and musical aspects of its arts are combined, so the descriptive verse of the garden poems embraces and often addresses all of these constituent elements of Jewish-Andalusian society. See HaNagid's “Have You Heard How I Helped the Wise” (in Cole, *Selected HaNagid*), Ibn Gabirol's “Winter with Its Ink,” “The Garden,” “The Field,” and (in Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*) “The Palace,” Moshe Ibn Ezra's “The Pen” and “A Shadow,” HaLevi's “Four Riddles,” and Shelomo DePiera's “Winter in Monzón.”

**desire, poems of (or love poetry):** The Hebrew term *shirei hesheq* (literally, poems of desire or love), like the Hebrew term for the gazelle (*tzvi*—see below), derives from an Arabic parallel and involves a case of loan translation and linguistic slippage: one of the Arabic words for “passion” or “love” is *ishq*, and a change of the initial letter brought poets to the biblical Hebrew *hesheq*.

Sometimes considered a subset of the wine poem (since the object of desire is often the cupbearer), the Hebrew poem of desire could adopt a variety of approaches, from overtly and powerfully sensual description of the beloved and the scene of the encounter, to wholly idealized portrayals of a refined situation, to humorous accounts of frustration and failure in the pursuit of

experience. Strict if subtle conventions are adhered to, and knowing them and their social context helps distinguish the poetry's "purpose" and desired effect. The lover, for example, is usually miserable; the beloved is generally fickle and cruel; depictions of the beloved are stylized; and the poem implies no specific autobiographical experience (though neither does it rule any out). "It sometimes happens," writes Moshe Ibn Ezra, "that a poet can write of love without ever having loved" (*The Book of Discussion*, 143a). (For more specific criteria, see Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 287–88.) And, indeed, these poems comprise less a record of sexual adventure than what Andras Hamori has called "a badge of sensibility." As they celebrate a given moment and its qualities, the poems embody a sensitivity to beauty and a capacity for pleasure that are generalized (even polymorphous), and extend well beyond the confines of a given erotic situation. That said, they are at times powerfully sensual in every respect, and considerable controversy still surrounds the Hebrew poems of desire, particularly the homoerotic verse, with some scholars finding it impossible to square the explicit (homo)erotic atmosphere with the fact that the poets were ritually observant, learned Jews.

With regard to the question of homosexual *experience* and how it is that these pious Jews could possibly be "flouting" something so clearly prohibited by Scripture, the jury is still out. While we do not know whether any of the Jewish poets had homosexual experience, we do know that Andalusian court culture was *not* homophobic, and that homoerotic poems were both common and powerful. On the whole, the poems do not feel like the literary exercises some scholars make them out to be, and they might best be taken at face value—like the erotic poems of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman perhaps—with all the ambiguity that implies.

As the conventions of the poetry of desire, like wine poetry, were in the Arabic tradition adopted by the Sufis and subtly manipulated along religious lines, so too the Andalusian Hebrew poets brought the eroticism of secular poetry into the synagogue to create surprisingly (and at times stunningly) sensuous poems of devotion. Ibn Gabirol, Moshe Ibn Ezra, and HaLevi excelled at this sort of grafting.

See Ibn Khalfoun's "Love in Me Stirs"; HaNagid's "The Gazelle" and "In Fact I Love That Fawn"; Ibn Gabirol's "You Lie in My Palace"; Moshe Ibn Ezra's "Heart's Desire," "Gold," and "The Gazelle's Sigh"; HaLevi's "That Day while I Had Him," "A Doe Far from Home" and "Love's Dwelling"; Yehuda Alharizi's "Boys"; Todros Abulafia's "I've Labored in Love," "She Said She Wanted," and "There's Nothing Wrong in Wanting a Woman"; and Ibn Danaan's erotic epigrams.

**diwan:** A gathering of a given poet's poems, usually a "collected poems." The word is Persian in origin, and means—among other things—register, or record, as in Ibn Khaldun's famous pronouncement, "Poetry is the *diwan* of the Arabs," i.e., their historical record, or archive. Some of the *diwans* were compiled by the

poets themselves, but most were put together by later (or contemporary) copyists and amateur lovers of poetry. The poems were often prefaced with headings describing the circumstances of composition or the poem's subject matter. The headings to the Hebrew Andalusian poems were always written in Judeo-Arabic; in Christian Spain, they were sometimes composed in Hebrew. Poems within the *diwan* were arranged either by chronology (to the extent that could be determined); alphabetically by their rhyme letter or the first word of the poem; by theme, genre, and meter; or in some cases by other, more complicated schemes. While the term *diwan* denoted a collection of secular verse, in fact most of the extant Hebrew *diwans* (in Arabic, *dawawiin*) contain some liturgical poems as well.

**encomia (poetry of praise):** According to Arabic tradition, it is possible to divide all of poetry and its genres into two overall categories: praise (*madiih*) and scorn (*dhamm*). Along this line of thinking, the elegy involves praise for the dead; the erotic poem praise of beauty (male or female); the descriptive poem praise of nature; the boast poem praise of self; the wine poem praise of wine and drinking; the contemplative or gnomic poem praise of wisdom; poems of friendship praise for a leader, patron, prominent figure, or friend; and so forth. Satire or invective would then involve disparagement of a particular person (or his attributes); the poem of complaint scorn for one's own situation; poems of asceticism scorn for the world; and so on. Given the social circumstances of medieval Arabic and Hebrew poetry alike, where the poet sometimes depended on support from patrons or the extended court environment, it was natural that encomia constituted a considerable percentage of a poet's *diwan*. That said, many of the encomia are in fact poems addressed to friends rather than patrons, and celebrate either friendship itself or the qualities one admires in a peer—both potentially serious subjects for poetry. While there is a good deal of formulaic, panegyric verse among these poems of praise, the social occasion that called for them sometimes resulted in the composition of poems of true feeling and serious criticism (through subtle departure from accepted convention); sensuality (in the erotic prelude to the encomia); or meditation on value (elsewhere in the *qasida*—on which, see below). Not all encomia were odes; short poems of praise were written as well. On the whole, the poetry of praise should not be dismissed as a form of empty flattery (though it could be just that); it is rather what Julie Meisami describes as a complex literary vehicle for the presentation of cultural ideals. See Ibn Hasdai's "The Qasida," HaLevi's "On Friendship and Time," Alharizi's "A Poem No Patron Has Ever Heard," and, in Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, "The Palace."

**epigram:** Epigrams are extremely common in both Arabic and Hebrew medieval literature, and they need to be distinguished within the more general category of the *qit'a*, or short poem. As in classical Greek, Latin, and English literature, the Hebrew epigram is characterized by brevity, wit, and its point,

or strong sense of closure. In the Arabic tradition, longer qasidas were often “ransacked” by anthologists for epigrammatic lines that would stand on their own, and this anthology contains several of these “detached” epigrams (the source of which is always listed in the notes to the poem). Epigrams ranged widely in theme, but gnomic, satirical, elegiac, and erotic epigrams abound.

**fakhr:** Literally, “pride” (Arabic); as a literary term it indicates self-vaunting poetry or a boast. Though sometimes considered as a genre of Arabic poetry, it is in fact an attitude or mode that finds expression in a variety of ways. In the oral culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, the poet was not only the spokesman of his tribe but a shamanlike figure who possessed magical powers and could help determine the fate of his people, by instilling them with strength-yielding confidence and demoralizing the enemy. The qasida or ode was one of their primary forms of communication in this respect, and in the pre-Islamic context the boast formed one of that poem’s dominant elements, traditionally coming at the end of the three-part ode or in the body of the two-part ode. It was a common motif in subsequent Arabic and Andalusian Hebrew poetry as well. Originally the boast embodied either communal or personal virtues, especially those of *muruuwwa* (manliness), including generosity, heroism, fidelity, and self-control. While it is often hard for modern readers to relate to this self-satisfied or egoistical aspect of medieval Arabic and Hebrew work, it may help to see the boast poem on the one hand as a culture-bound vehicle for the transmission of value, and on the other as a Norman Mailer–like advertisement for oneself uttered in the highly competitive arena of literature—a literary analogue, perhaps, to the “trash talk” of contemporary athletes. Again, this element was less pronounced in the Hebrew poetry of the day than it was in the Arabic. See HaNagid’s “On Fleeing His City” and (in Cole, *Selected HaNagid*) “Have You Heard How I Helped the Wise,” and Ibn Gabirol’s “I’m Prince to the Poem,” “Truth Seekers Turn,” “On Leaving Saragossa,” “I Am the Man,” “Prologue to *The Book of Grammar*,” and (in *Selected Ibn Gabirol*) “The Palace” and “As the Roots of a Tree.”

**gazelle:** Poets used several Hebrew terms to represent the figure of the beloved, including *tzvi* (f., *tzviyya*), *’ofer* (f., *’ofra*), and *ya’alat hen* (f.)—all of which can be translated variously as gazelle, hart, deer, fawn, hind, doe, roe, and more, depending on the circumstances of a given poem. The motif in Hebrew poetry evolved from both Song of Songs 2:9 (“Behold, my beloved is like a gazelle [*tzvi*] or a young hart [*’ofer ha’ayalim*]”) and from the tradition of Arabic love poetry, which often likens the beloved to a gazelle (*ghazaal* or *zabi*—the Arabic cognate of the Hebrew *tzvi*). As the Arabic word for the desirable young man or woman is a near-cognate—*sabi* or *sabiyya* (f.) (the root of which, as a verb, means “to feel sensual desire for,” just as *tzvi* in Hebrew can also mean “beauty” or “glory” or “that which is desired”)—an interesting opportunity for loan translation presented itself. Erotic poetry in Arabic is in fact known as *ghazal*, which also involves another case of linguistic slippage. The word derives from the verb

*ghazala*, to spin, but assumed the associations of the gazelle early on. At times the feminine form of the animal will be used to represent a masculine beloved, or vice versa; at other times, the pronoun is a reliable indication of the beloved's gender. In the liturgical poetry the gazelle appears as an image of God (m.) or the congregation of Israel (f.). See Ibn Mar Sha'ul's "A Fawn Sought in Spain," HaNagid's "The Gazelle," Ibn Gabirol's "You Lie in my Palace," Moshe Ibn Ezra's "The Gazelle's Sigh," Alharizi's "Measure for Measure," Todros Abulafia's "She Said She Wanted," and many other poems. For more on the subject of erotic poetry and homoeroticism, see *DESIRE, POEMS OF*.

**genre:** Genres play a prominent role in medieval Hebrew poetry, and knowledge of the available generic options is necessary for proper reading of the work and appreciation of the ways in which poets manipulated their materials and at times transcended the period's conventions. Rather than viewing these conventions as impediments toward expression, one might first consider the ways in which generic assumptions and conventions live on and flourish in our own culture: in literature and drama (the fourth wall and the omniscient narrator); in rock and country songs (particularly about love); in films (through the sometimes contrived mechanisms propelling romantic comedies, murder mysteries, and road movies); in television shows, and elsewhere. As Paul Fussell has put it, "The notion that convention shows a lack of feeling, and that a poet attains 'sincerity' . . . by disregarding [convention], is opposed to all the facts of literary experience and history." See individual entries for *encomia*, wine poetry, erotic verse, contemplative verse, and so on.

**ge'ula:** Literally, [a poem of] "redemption," "salvation," or "deliverance." A liturgical poem that was originally part of the *yotzer* and treats Israel's exile and hopes for salvation. The *ge'ula* was recited on Sabbaths and festivals before the final benediction after the recitation of the Shema': "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Redeemer (*go'el*) of Israel." In Spain, the *ge'ulot* were often strophic. See Ibn Ghiyyat's "My Wandering" and HaLevi's "If Only I Could Be."

**hijaa':** See *INVECTIVE*.

**invective:** One of the principle genres of Arabic poetry, invective (Arabic, *hijaa'*) is the inverse of the poetry of praise (see *ENCOMIA*, above). The Arabic word may originally have meant "casting a spell," and like the English word "spell" it also means "to write out." Both indicate a possible origin in magic, where the utterance of curses could destroy the honor of a person or tribe by articulating, and broadcasting, shameful attributes—sometimes as a prelude to, or substitute for, actual combat or violent confrontation. While the magical aspect of the enterprise eventually vanished, the destructive power of the utterance did not, and the Arabic and Hebrew medieval poets could be lethal in their verbal assaults. *Hijaa'* verse assumes a variety of forms, but it is particularly acute when loaded into the epigram, or concealed in a longer *qasida* of praise, where it would have ambushed its off-balance victim. The invective might be directed at a person or an entire group of people (e.g., a religion).

For all its ability to injure, however, the invective was also a source of amusement, humor, and—one assumes—catharsis. Again, the poem of invective was less common in Hebrew than it was in Arabic. See HaNagid's "The Critique," Ibn Gabirol's "The Altar of Song," Alharizi's "A Miser in Mosul" and "Born to Baseness," and Benveniste's "The Tongue Speaks and the Hand Records." Sometimes a single poem could be both a poem of praise and scorn: see, for example, Alharizi's "Palindrome for a Patron."

**kharja:** The final couplet of the secular *muwashshah*, usually written out in the Arabic or Romance vernacular (or in a combination of the two) and spoken by a young woman or a creature of the poet's invention—such as a dove or the wind—from outside the masculine context of the poem, and sometimes outside its aristocratic environment. *Kharjas* were regularly drawn ready-made from Andalusian folk tradition, and the *muwashshah* would often be created around a given couplet from that tradition. In some instances they preserve the oldest known form of Spanish. The word itself is Arabic for "exit." Not all Hebrew *muwashshahat* contained the *kharja*. See HaLevi's "If Only I Could Give" and Todros Abulafia's "I Take Delight in My Cup and Wine."

**line:** The principal Hebrew line (*bayit*—literally, "house"; plural, *batim*) taken over from Arabic comprised two generally symmetrical hemistiches, known as the *delet* (door) and the *sogair* (latch, or lock). In Arabic these were known as the *sadr* (chest, front) and the *'ajouz* (backside or rump). Each of these was normally end-stopped, but enjambment across the first hemistich was not uncommon. In both the shorter *qit'a* and the longer, polythematic *qasida*, the *sogair*, or second hemistich of each line, would maintain a single end-rhyme (monorhyme) throughout the length of the poem. It was also standard—but not required—for the opening hemistich (the initial *delet*) of the poem to rhyme with its *sogair*.

- 1) ----- a -----a  
 2) ----- x -----a  
 3) ----- x -----a

In printed editions of the poetry, and almost always in translation (particularly into an uninflected English, which is much less compact), the two parts of the line or *bayit* are sometimes printed on two separate lines.

- 1) -----a  
       -----a  
 2) -----x  
       -----a

The lines of the *qasida* and *qit'a* alike were composed in one of the quantitative meters (and their variants) that were also adapted from Arabic prosody.

For other Hebrew forms of the line, see MUWASHSHAH and STROPHIC POEM, below.

**maqama:** A rhymed-prose picaresque narrative that sometimes instructs as it entertains and is almost always interspersed with metrical poems illustrating developments in the story. It can tell a single continuous narrative or comprise a series of independent stories. The *maqama*'s characters (who are usually given biblical names) include a narrator of solid social standing who wanders from place to place for business or pleasure and a restless, peripatetic protagonist who has fallen from grace and is now shameless in his quest for sustenance and personal gain. The protagonist also happens to be, by convention, a poet of remarkable gifts. The two men meet in nearly every chapter. The term *maqama* is Arabic and implies a "place of assembly" or "public gathering," as the stories were almost always recited in such a forum. See Ibn Tzaqbel, Alharizi, Ibn Zabara, Ya'aqov Ben Elazar, and others.

**martial verse:** The only martial verse in the postbiblical Hebrew canon is by Shmu'el HaNagid. HaNagid's battle poems combine the Arabic tradition of *muruwwa* (manhood or manliness) and the *hamaasa* (epic tradition) with sophisticated use of Hebrew biblical typologies. Often deriving his descriptions of a given battle from the tradition of Arabic martial verse, and mixing that with realia from the campaigns that he may himself have led (or administered), HaNagid then uses biblical elements to weave that compound into a full-fledged typological landscape. HaNagid himself, in that scheme, is seen as a David-like warrior-poet leading a kind of national renaissance, and his enemies (who were in fact the enemies of the Muslim Granadan army he led) become the incarnation of the ancient enemies of Israel. For all that, the poems are nonetheless highly personal. Several took the place of prayer on a given day, and some were written in commemoration of major Granadan victories, which are then elided into a triumph for the Jewish community as a whole. Other poems treat dream visions relating to battle. See HaNagid's "On Lifting the Siege" and "The War with Yaddayir" in this anthology; there are numerous other battle poems in Cole, *Selected HaNagid*.

**mehayyeh:** Literally, "He who revives." The *mehayyeh* is a liturgical poem that prefaces the second benediction of the central prayer of the Hebrew liturgy, the *'amida* (the standing prayer): "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who callest the dead to life everlasting." See Ibn Gabirol's "Send Your Spirit." The *mehayyeh* is the second part of the *qedushta* (a larger Eastern composition of liturgical poems composed to be performed around the first two blessings of the *'amida* and its *qedusha*, or sanctification of the Lord of hosts).

**me'ora:** Literally, "[a poem of] light." Intended to ornament the first blessing leading up to the recitation of the Shema': "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Creator of the heavenly lights." The *me'ora* usually treats the relationship between God and the congregation of Israel, and expresses hope in the coming redemption. See Nahum's "Winter Has Waned." Part of the *yotzer*.

**muharak:** A liturgical poem that prefaces the *nishmat kol hai* prayer (“The breath of every living being shall bless Thy name, O Lord”). The *muharak*, which is recited before the prayer and after the *reshut* to the *nishmat* (see *RESHUT*), is strophic, and often deals with the nature and qualities of the soul. The term is Arabic and means “mover” or “one which moves”; it was most likely connected to the way in which the *piyyut* was originally sung and performed in the synagogue. See HaLevi’s “If Only I Could Be.”

**mustajaab (or mustajiiib):** A kind of *seliha* (see below), the *mustajaab* is a common Spanish-Hebrew strophic form beginning with a biblical verse that subsequently serves as a refrain throughout the hymn. (The term itself is Arabic and means “response.”) The final lines of each strophe are also biblical and rhyme with the concluding word of the refrain. (Sometimes these rhyme words are identical.) See Ibn Gabirol’s “He Dwells Forever” and Moshe Ben Nahman’s “Before the World Ever Was.”

**muwashshah:** An Andalusian Arabic strophic form, apparently developed from Romance folk poetry and adopted in the eleventh century by the Hebrew poets. In Hebrew, as in Arabic, the poem weaves together two (often elaborate) rhyme schemes, and sometimes two metrical schemes as well. The secular *muwashshah* usually closes with a *kharja* (see above). The *muwashshahat* were sung, and one often senses in the written texts the absence of the musical accompaniment and its shifting rhythms. The term itself has, unfortunately, been translated into English as “girdle poem” (no doubt as in the older meaning of that word—“belt”). In fact, the Arabic verb *washshaha* means to adorn or dress, and the noun *wushshaah* is “an ornamented sash or belt—in older times a doubled band with embedded gems worn sash-like over the shoulder (H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* [1961; London and Beirut, 1980], pp. 1070–71).” One might, then, best think of the *muwashshah* as a poem in which the rhyming chorus winds about the various strophes of the poem as a gem-studded sash cuts across the body. Generally speaking, the *muwashshah* was considered a “nonclassical” form, and it was initially looked down upon in the Arabic tradition; *muwashshahat* were not usually included in a poet’s *diwan*, and if they were, they were often relegated to the back of the manuscript and constituted a separate section. The earliest Arabic *muwashshahat* date from the end of the tenth century; in Hebrew the earliest extant *muwashshahat* are by Shmu’el HaNagid. The first liturgical *muwashshahat* are by Ibn Gabirol. In Hebrew, the *muwashshah* was absorbed more quickly into liturgical verse than it was into the secular dimension. For a telling example of the way in which this form could be adapted in Hebrew for either secular or liturgical use, see HaLevi’s “If Only I Could Give” and “If Only I Could Be.” Also Moshe Ibn Ezra’s “Heart’s Desire,” Ibn Tzaddiq’s “Lady of Grace,” and Todoros Abulafia’s “I Take Delight in My Cup and Wine.”

**nasiib:** The first and usually nostalgic section of the *qasida*. In the classical Arabic *qasida*, the *nasiib* is erotic and always refers to a relationship in the past. The

poet comes across the ruins or traces (*atlaal*) of an abandoned campsite (*daar, manzil*), which trigger a series of memories of the beloved's beauty and the couple's time together. The poet laments the loss of that richness, but regains his composure and vows to move on. Sometimes the *nasiib* incorporates a night vision of the beloved (*khayyal, tayf*). Other motifs include the poet's watching the beloved's tribe prepare for departure. In the Hebrew *qasida*, as in the Arabic, the *nasiib* might be erotic (usually homoerotic), but at times it also faintly echoes the tradition of the abandoned campsite and embodies the theme of separation in any number of subtle ways. Transition from the *nasiib* to the body of the Hebrew poem is effected by means of the *takhallus* (literally, the "extrication" or "release"), a verse that tested the poet's skill and agility. See Yosef Ibn Hasdai's "The Qasida" and HaLevi's "To Ibn al-Mu'allim."

**ne'ila:** A penitential poem accompanying the fifth and final prayer session on the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew term means "closing," and the *ne'ila* is recited toward sundown, as the gates of heaven—which have been open during the festival—are shut until the following year. See Moshe Ibn Ezra's "At the Hour of Closing."

**nishmat:** See *RESHUT*.

**ofan:** The *ofan* is a section of the *yotzer* accompanying the part of the prayer service known as the *qedusha* (sanctification); it is recited between the *qedusha*'s two verses: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3) and "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His heavenly abode" (Ezekiel 3:12). The Hebrew term refers to the type of angels mentioned in the prayer that links these two verses: "And the celestial beings (*ofanim*) of the heavenly chariot, with great stirring, rise toward the seraphim and all together they respond with praise." The *ofan* tends to reflect that celestial "stirring" in its percussive cadence and dense, often alliterative weave. Generally speaking, it describes the holiness of the heavenly beings and their work. See Ibn Gabirol's "Angels Amassing" and HaSniri's "The Worship of Wood and a Fool."

**ornament:** A wide variety of rhetorical figures taken from Arabic poetry were employed in the composition of Hebrew verse, and numerous parallels to them can be found in Greek and Latin rhetoric. A very short list of important Hebrew and Arabic ornaments would include *shibbutz* or *iqtibaas* (quotation or inlay), *tajniis* (paronomasia, or word play of numerous sorts), *haqbalat hafakhim* or *mutaabaqa* (antithesis), *mubaalagha* (hyperbole), *mubaalagha maqbulula* (acceptable hyperbole), *istitraad* (digression), *isti'aara* (metaphor), *hita-memut* (feigned ignorance), and *husn al-ta'aliil* (fantastic etiology, or finding an interesting fictitious cause for a fact in reality). The categories of rhetorical figures are often extremely detailed and involve subtle distinctions between the varieties of figuration. Far from constituting a rote, prettifying application to an otherwise useful but plain facade, biblical inlay and the other ornaments of

this poetry serve to highlight a given aspect of the verse by focusing attention on it and intensifying emphasis and effect. In a sense, the ornaments act like tiny turbines to the current of the verse, thousands of finely constructed stations-of-power set out along its flow.

**personal poem:** It is often hard for modern readers to understand the difference in the medieval context between “individuality” and “the personal” in poetry. While the Arabic and Hebrew traditions provided poets with a fixed set of genres and a host of conventions that they were expected to employ, the expression of individuality in verse was by no means ruled out. On the contrary, the conventions challenged the poet to place his stamp on the composition of the verse and the employment of the genres. While the poet’s individuality does not necessarily manifest itself through “confession” or registration of the “personal” experience of which modern readers are so enamored, there is a good deal more of the personal in this verse than has often been acknowledged (see introduction, note 61), and poets often worked their own experience into the conventional parameters. Beyond that, some of their best poems involve the creation of a *sui generis* poetic mode, which scholars now refer to as the “personal poem.” These poems treat singular and ephemeral, as opposed to the conventional, idealized, or essentialized situations of the classical genres. They detail the chronological, biographical, or experiential uniqueness of a given moment. And just as personal formulations and even personal experience might be worked into the conventional genres, so too conventional or idealized or general elements could be woven into the registration of the personal. See HaNagid’s “On Lifting the Siege,” Ibn Gabirol’s “I Am the Man,” Moshe Ibn Ezra’s “The Dove” and “Why Does Time Hound Me So,” HaLevi’s sea poems, and Avraham Ibn Ezra’s “A Cloak,” “The Flies,” and “The Wedding Night.”

**pizmon:** The term itself means “refrain” and can refer to a wide variety of liturgical poems. In Spain, *pizmonim* tended to be strophic poems of an archaic cast with an introductory verse and refrain. See Ibn Avitor’s “Hymn for the New Year.” Refrains can also be found in Ibn Gabirol’s “He Dwells Forever,” Moshe Ibn Ezra’s “At the Hour of Closing,” and Nahmanides’ “Before the World Ever Was.”

**piyyut:** A liturgical poem. Both medieval and modern editions of medieval Hebrew poetry distinguish between *shirei hol* and *shirei qodesh*, that is, secular poems and sacred poems. In practice, however, the term *shirei qodesh*, and by implication *piyyut*, indicate poems written for incorporation into the liturgy. The term “secular poem” in this context simply means a poem for a nonliturgical setting: it may still involve religious and devotional concerns, without being a *piyyut*. The poet who composes *piyyutim* is called a *paytan*—both words deriving from the Greek *poietes* (maker).

**qasida:** An Arabic term indicating an ode, technically a polythematic poem of a certain length (in Hebrew, up to 149 lines) and written in monorhyme with a single classical quantitative meter. The qasida was developed by the fifth-century

pre-Islamic Bedouin poets, who usually divided the ode into three overall parts (with many variable subdivisions): the *nasiib* (erotic prelude, which often included a “weeping over the abandoned campsite,” or *atlaal*), the *rahiil* (journey across the desert, which included extensive description of the landscape’s flora and fauna), and the *madiih* (encomium, or poem of praise, which often included a boast of some sort, advancing the values of the tribe or individual). Their respective themes might be summed up as “loss and longing,” “setting out,” and “celebration” or “condemnation.” The term *qasida* is Arabic and derives, it seems, from the verb meaning “to intend” or “to aim.” (Others feel that it refers to one of the ancient quantitative meters, which—like all the quantitative meters—early on were deployed in the two-part line, the distich, with monorhyme.) This intention—which came to expression in the encomium—could range widely from the tribal to the personal, but almost always involved the embodiment and presentation of critical cultural value. The seven great odes of the pre-Islamic tradition are known as the *Mu’allaqat* (the “hanging odes”), as legend, possibly grounded in historic fact, has it that they were hung on curtains draped over the pagan shrine of the Qa’aba (the Black Stone) at Mecca—a practice indicative of the central role that poetry has played in Arab society. In later Islamic periods and the courtly urban environments of Abbasid Baghdad, the *qasida* evolved in a variety of ways, gradually losing its central section (the *rahiil*) and taking on a bipartite form: *nasiib* and *madiih* (prelude and praise—with the praise often being followed by a request or message of some sort). In some poems, the erotic prelude was replaced by other subjects, and the encomium by its inverse: lampoon or invective (*hijaa’*). The Hebrew poets took up these developments and for the most part composed bipartite *qasidas*, though echoes of the three-part *qasida* can also be detected in certain instances (see, for instance, HaNagid’s “On Fleeing His City”). In the two-part *qasida* the *nasiib* is—if all goes well—gracefully joined to the body of the poem by means of the *takhallus* (literally, the “extrication,” i.e., transition), which, as it employs any number of possible rhetorical strategies, often mentions the name of the person being praised (in an encomium) and somehow links the parts thematically or in associative fashion. For a classic two-part *qasida* employing many of the Arabic motifs and figures, see Ibn Hasdai’s “The *Qasida*.” All the longer, non-strophic poems in this book are *qasidas*, though these long poems are sometimes broken down in translation into manageable English stanzas.

***qina* (for the Ninth of Av):** There are two kinds of *qinot* in medieval Hebrew poetry. The first is a liturgical poem for the Ninth of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Liturgical poems of this sort were intended for recitation as part of the morning *qerova*, specifically, the part that ornaments the fourteenth benediction of the *’amida* on festivals (“Blessed art Thou, O Lord, [consoler of Zion], the builder of Jerusalem”), or on the evening of the holiday and the holiday itself.

**qina (elegy):** The second type of *qina* was simply a poem for the dead, an elegy (*marthiya* in the Arabic tradition), which could be deeply personal, written on commission, or provided for a member of the congregation. *Qinot* were also written for entire (destroyed) communities. Hebrew *qinot* (for the dead) go back to the Bible, the Talmud, and Eastern Jewish poetry. In Spain they developed as a secular subgenre modeled after monorhymed Arabic elegies, though in some cases (when they related to communities) they were later incorporated into the liturgy, for the Ninth of Av in particular. The Jewish poets also wrote strophic *qinot*, incorporating biblical elements, that mention the name of the deceased in the final line of each stanza. See Ibn Avitur's "Lament for the Jews of Zion," HaNagid's "On the Death of Isaac, His Brother," Ibn Gabirol's "See the Sun," HaLevi's "Won't You Ask, Zion," and Avraham Ibn Ezra's "Lament for Andalusian Jewry" and "Elegy for a Son."

**qit'a:** A short poem in the Arabic tradition, up to ten lines (twenty in English), treating a range of secular genres and themes. The *qit'a* (which means "fragment," or "piece") was for a long time thought to have "broken off" a larger composition (the *qasida*), but scholars now believe that they were also written as discrete, monothematic poems.

**rehuta:** An unrhymed *seliha* (penitential poem). The term itself derives from the root meaning "quick" or "smooth," as the poems are read rapidly and without any breaks or refrains. They also employ numerous scriptural references. Later poets imitated this form, which appears to have been introduced by Avraham Ibn Ezra. See his "I Bow Down" and Avraham Ben Shmu'el's "To Whom among the Avengers of Blood."

**reshut:** Originally a poetic prelude in which the *paytan* asked "permission" (*reshut*) from God and the congregation to recite a poem as part of the liturgy. In Spain the term indicated a short poem recited before part of the standard liturgy or before the Sabbath or festival prayer service as a whole. The *reshuyot* (plural) often employed the Arabized forms and motifs of secular poems and allowed for the individual expression of the *paytan* before the congregation and not simply in its name. As such, it stood in sharp contrast to the Eastern tradition of liturgical poetry and, not surprisingly, gave rise to some of the finest Spanish-Hebrew poems of devotion. *Reshuyot* to the *nishmat kol hai* prayer ("The breath of every living being shall bless Thy name, O Lord") were particularly popular and accomplished among the Spanish poets, though other liturgical stations were also ornamented with *reshuyot*. See Ibn Gabirol's "I Look for You," "Open the Gate," "The Hour of Song," and more; also Levi Ibn Altabbaan's "Utter His Oneness," HaLevi's "The Morning Stars" and "You Knew Me," Avraham Ibn Ezra's "Sent Out from the Glory" and "I Call to Him," and Shelomo DePiera's "Tabernacles: A Prayer."

**saj':** A term that is usually, if inadequately, translated as "rhymed prose," or "rhymed, rhythmic prose." Essentially belletristic, or formal, it is distinguished in the Arabic tradition from ordinary, unadorned prose. *Saj'* was used

by pre-Islamic soothsayers for their oracular statements and incantations, and it is also employed extensively in the Quran. (See Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'án* [Ashland, 1999], for more on the way in which the “prose” of the Quran functions as poetry.) The Arabic word itself derives from the verb meaning “to coo,” and evokes, as the lexicographer E. W. Lane illustrates it, “a pigeon continuing its cry uninterruptedly in one uniform way or manner . . . cooing and prolonging its voice.” The origins of Hebrew *saj'* can be traced to classical liturgical poetry from the East (from the sixth century on) and to rhymed epistolary prose, which emerges in the early tenth century. Ibn Gabirol's masterpiece, *Kingdom's Crown*, is also composed in *saj'*. While in early eleventh-century Hebrew the form was most often reserved for epistolary writing, in Ibn Gabirol's hands the *saj'* is much closer to a kind of pulsing, symphonic free verse. All the Arabic and Hebrew *maqamas* are written in *saj'*, where it becomes a vehicle of entertaining and often humorous narrative. For more on the topic, see Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, pp. 289–90, and in this anthology, the selections from Ibn Gabirol's *Kingdom's Crown* and Qalonymos Ben Qalonymos' “On Becoming a Woman.”

**seliha:** A general term describing poems written for fast days and days of penitence, especially those between the New Year and the Day of Atonement. The Hebrew term means “pardon” or “forgiveness” (i.e., a poem asking for forgiveness), and this overarching genre treats numerous subjects and includes a variety of subgenres, such as the *tokheha*, *vidu'i*, *qina*, *baqasha*, *mustajaab*, and more. The Spanish-Hebrew poets also composed some lyrical *selihot* of a personal rather than communal cast. See Moshe Ibn Ezra's “The Day to Come,” Avraham Ibn Ezra's “Blessèd Is He Who Fears,” “To the Soul,” and “Children of Exile,” HaLevi's “A Dove in the Distance,” and Moshe Ben Nahman's “Before the World Ever Was.”

**shibbutz:** The *shibbutz*—the use of recognizable scriptural verses or fragments of verses in poems—is one of the more well-known ornaments in medieval Hebrew literature. It consists of at least three biblical words, not necessarily in the order in which they appear in Scripture, and can take several forms. The “neutral *shibbutz*” (by far the most common kind) employs scriptural elements but does not consciously involve the original context of the biblical phrase or substantially affect the interpretation of the poem. (“Neutral” here is a relative term; the fact that the words are drawn from Scripture lends them, from the start, a valence and prestige that are anything but “neutral.”) “Charged *shibbutzim*” use implants that deliberately play off the original context of the scriptural fragment, adding substantially if subtly to the associative field of the poem. This kind of *shibbutz* was employed in a wide variety of ways and its effect ranged widely. It might convey information essential to our understanding of the poem as a whole and our appreciation of its beauty, or merely pertain to a certain aspect of the poem; and it could use the scriptural verse in ironic or wholly irreverent fashion, or radically alter its meaning. And finally,

full-fledged biblical allusion acts like any literary allusion to a classical text. While implants of this sort were employed in earlier Hebrew verse, their role was enhanced with the Andalusian Jewish poets' return to a pure biblical diction, and the possibilities that *shibbutzim* offered for the subtle shading of meaning—and for surprise—were exploited. That said, the *shibbutz* should not, for the most part, be treated as a “key” to the poem's meaning.

The term itself is somewhat misleading and in fact reflects a development in nineteenth-century German scholarship (where it was known as *mussivstil*). The Hebrew term *shibbutz* means “setting” or “inlay,” as in the craft of the jeweler or mosaicist, and relies on a metaphor that misses the dynamic action of the scriptural force in the poem. Like most of the rhetorical ornaments of this poetry, the use of scriptural fragments in the weave of the verse was, in part, brought over from Arabic literature, where it was based on the Quran and was known as *iqtibaas*, “the lighting of one flame from another.” Far from implying a static effect, it suggested a source of power and transfer of energy. That effect, however, is usually local and has been described as lights flashing on and off for different periods of time and at different levels of strength and intensity.

Another compelling explanation of this rhetorical device is offered by Neal Kozodoy: “We might think of the poem,” he writes, “as a garment woven with great skill from costly and colorful material. Into this fabric have been twined threads of pure gold, beaten down from a single golden bar, the Bible; . . . [These threads] call attention to themselves, first, inviting us to hold up the work, tilting it at a variety of angles and planes in an attempt to perceive whether they might not form some hidden pattern. At the same time, they impart real depth and brilliance to the surfaces surrounding them, and as we study those surfaces we become struck by the impression of motion, as the presence of the pure gold subtly alters the values and intensities of the surrounding hues.”

**strophic poem:** A poem that employs rhymed strophes rather than the bipartite, monorhymed line of the *qasida* and the *qit'a*. Among the forms of strophic poetry in Hebrew are the *shir me'ain eizori* or *shir me'ain eizor* (semi-*muwashshah*) and the *muwashshah*. In fact, the Hebrew strophic poems may have evolved from an entirely separate Hebrew tradition, which existed in the East prior to the development of the Arabic *muwashshah* in Andalusia. The strophic poem can employ a wide variety of stanzaic structures and rhyme schemes, including a refrain, and might be written in syllabic or quantitative meter, or with no meter at all. See Ibn Gabirol's “He Dwells Forever.”

**tokheha:** Literally, “admonition.” A subgenre of the *seliha*, it originated in the early stages of the Eastern *piyyut* and was still written during the Spanish period. Alone among all the penitential genres it is not addressed to God and like certain *reshuyot* does not speak in the name of the people or the nation. Instead, the *paytan* turns to the individual worshiper and implores him to repent

and confess his sins. At times the *paytan* will also turn to God and ask for forgiveness, while detailing man's weakness and worthlessness. The genre was popular among the Spanish poets, as it dealt with the soul and its fate, both important subjects for them. They were often recited alongside the *vidu'i* (poem of confession) and on the Day of Atonement. See Avraham Ibn Ezra's "You Whose Hearts Are Asleep" and, in Cole, *Selected Ibn Gabirol*, "Forget Your Grief."

**'Udhri poetry:** Elegiac poetry treating unrealized love in the early Arabic tradition. The term derives from the Yemeni Banu 'Udhra, two of whose poets wrote powerfully of devotion to the beloved and a willingness to undergo hardship in love. Famous tragic lovers of the 'Udhri tradition, such as Majnun and Layla, are separated but remain faithful and eventually die of sorrow. The tradition was developed further in Abbasid and Sufi contexts, and the Hebrew poets adopted various elements of it, especially in their religious verse. See Ibn Ghiyyat's "My Wandering" and HaLevi's "Love's Dwelling."

**vidu'i:** A section of the liturgy recited on fast days and days of penitence, especially those between the New Year and the Day of Atonement. Sometimes incorporated into larger *piyyutim*. See, for example, Ibn Gabirol's *Kingdom's Crown* and Avner's "The Last Words of My Desire."

**wasf:** See DESCRIPTIVE VERSE.

**wine poetry:** Generally speaking Hebrew poetry adopts the conventions of the Abbasid wine poem (*khamriyya*), which in turn traces its origin to the classical *qasida*. The Hebrew wine poems share numerous motifs that are freely employed: an imperative, urging others to drink; lush descriptions of the wine's color, scent, age, effect, and provenance; description of the (male or female) cup-bearer (the *saqi*); and description of the site where the drinking takes place—along a river, in a garden or palace, or indoors during the winter; and the conventional rebuke of fault-finders, who chastise the speaker for indulging in drink when they should be weeping over the abandoned campsite (Arabic) or the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (Hebrew)—or simply avoiding licentiousness and sin (both). The wine's power to overcome grief is often noted, and sometimes religious, meditative, or even ethical dimensions are blended with the wine poem. The perspective of the poem almost always *appears* to be personal, though it is usually more stylized than, say, a poem of complaint. Like the Hebrew poems of desire, the Hebrew wine poems are not about indulgent or licentious behavior, but about sophisticated pleasure, perception, sensation, and company.

See HaNagid's "Mixed in Spain," "Your Years Are Sleep" and—in *Selected Poems of Shmuel HaNagid*, "Have You Heard How I Helped the Wise"; also Ibn Gabirol's "I'd Give Up My Soul Itself," Moshe Ibn Ezra's "Bring Me a Cup" and "A Shadow," and Shelomo DePiera's "This Year's Wine."

**wit and entertainment, poems of—also riddles:** This category covers a variety of poems that might also be subsumed under other generic headings. Some

riddles, for instance, are descriptive, some of the poems of wit involve invective, and the poems of entertainment could treat any number of categories, from wine to invective to description. Most but not all of these poems were cast in epigrammatic form. See HaNagid's "The Apple" and HaLevi's "Inscriptions on Bowls" and "Four Riddles" (as well as the notes to them).



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