

Toward a History of Hispano-Hebrew Literature in its Romance Context

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The state of the question

The Hebrew literature of Christian Iberia is doubly marginalized in that it is often overlooked by both Hispanists and Hebraists, and neither group has undertaken to study such literature extensively in light of its Romance language context. Even Hebrew authors whose maternal language was Castilian, Aragonese, or Catalan have been studied almost exclusively in terms of the Hebrew literature of the times. In this essay I will give an overview of the scholarship of the Hebrew literature of Christian Iberia, giving particular attention to studies focusing on the interaction between Romance language and Hebrew literary practice. Here I will present a series of case studies of Hispano-Hebrew authors whose literary practice coincides in certain aspects with that of their counterparts writing in Romance.

In the broader context of Medieval European literatures, scholars have recently begun to explore the question of vernacularity, or the cultural significance of writing in the vernacular as opposed to in classical languages (Somerset and Watson). In most of Europe, and from scholars working in departments of modern national languages, this usually means discussion of what it *means* to write in Middle English, or German, or French instead of in Latin.¹

As usual, the case of Spain is somewhat different, and the scholarly discussion of vernacularity in Spain deals not only with Hispano-Romance vis-à-vis Latin, but also vis-à-vis Arabic, the official language of those parts of al-Andalus that found themselves incorporated into Castile-Leon and Aragon from the 11th to the 13th centuries. Because Arabic and various dialects of Hispano-Romance have both been official languages of what is now Spain, modern scholars of national languages have included them both in their discussion of the vernacular.² Hebrew, never a language of state on the Iberian Peninsula, has only very tangentially been included in the discussion. Consequently, the Hebrew literature of the Christian Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula is often overlooked. Within Hebrew studies, authors working in the

¹ Other studies deal with vernaculars such Anglo-Norman and Middle English, as does Worley's study of the *Ormulum*.

² Even in the case of Castilian, histories of linguistics have tended to omit the very important 13th century during which Alfonso X the Learned established Castilian as the official language and successor to Arabic as a language of cutting edge knowledge production. Histories of linguistics in Spain typically omit the Alfonsine period and begin with Nebrija. Niederehe explains that this is because the linguistic theory in Alfonso X's works is more theoretical than practical (as in Renaissance grammarians such as Nebrija *et al.*) and does not appear in works on Grammar, but rather in historical works written not in Latin, but in Castilian, both characteristics that have contributed to their oversight by historians of linguistics (Niederehe xi).

13th-15th centuries are far overshadowed by their predecessors who lived and wrote in al-Andalus during Spain's first literary Golden Age, during the 10th-12th centuries. The later Hispano-Hebrew authors who lived in Christendom are sometimes dismissed as an afterthought, pretenders to or imitators of the glory of the Andalusí Hebrew heyday that produced the most revered poets in Hebrew tradition such as Yehuda Halevi, Moshe ibn Ezra, and Shmuel Hanagid Naghrela.³

Within Spanish studies, Hebrew authors are almost unheard of, with the occasional exception of one who happened to have written something in Castilian or Catalan. Literary historians of Medieval Spain have made scattered references to various Hispano-Hebrew authors, and Guillermo Díaz Plaja's *Historia general de las literaturas hispánicas* dedicates an entire section to "Literatura hebraicoespañola" (145-93) authored by Spanish Hebraist José María Millás Vallicrosa,⁴ but Hispanists have not yet begun to pay serious attention to the role of Hebrew literature in the literary life of the Christian kingdoms of medieval Iberia. Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, who has been most outspoken among Peninsular Hebraists on the topic, explains the situation as follows:

En [...] España nos hemos movido, incluso en las últimas décadas, entre el desconocimiento (o tal vez olvido más o menos pretendido de esta producción literaria), y la paulatina toma de conciencia de que nos encontramos ante una parte importante del legado cultural hispano, una de las literaturas en lengua no castellana que enriquecen el panorama de nuestro pasado (2001, 137)

Judit Targarona Borrás, who has worked extensively on the circle of Hebrew poets active in Zaragoza during the late 14th and early 15th century, likewise laments the lack of scholarly attention these authors have received from both Hispanists and Hebraists:

Fueron grandes poetas con una extensa obra, y las causas por las que al día de hoy son tan poco conocidos no son fáciles de explicar. Hasta este momento han sido completamente ignorados por los hispanistas, poco proclives a prestar atención a las literaturas no castellanas de nuestra península, pero también por los romanistas, mucho más sensibles a la riqueza multicultural de los reinos hispánicos. Pero lo peor es que han sido olvidados y dejados de lado por los mayores especialistas de la literatura hebrea de todos los tiempos. Su voz, ya sea por considerarse 'conversa,' o simplemente por ser ininteligible fuera del marco sociocultural románico en el que se dejó oír, se ha silenciado hasta tal punto que gran parte de su

³ Decter takes a more nuanced approach to the transition between Islamic and Christian Spain that stresses continuities in addition to changes between the two periods (13-15).

⁴ See also the comments of Menocal on Díaz Plaja's history (2004, 65-68).

obra no ha sido editada todavía, y lo que sí lo ha sido precisa de una nueva revisión.” (2002, 251)

These comments, both made in recent years, bring home the idea that Spain suffers from a sort of collective amnesia when it comes to her medieval poets who wrote in Hebrew.⁵ As Targarona Borrás suggests, some extrapeninsular scholars of Hebrew suffer from a mirror-image amnesia, and would like to imagine that the Hebrew literature of Spanish Jews was the product of a hermetically Jewish culture, allowing perhaps (and only relatively recently thanks to the work of David Yellin and Dan Pagis on Arabic poetics in Hebrew literature) for some influence from the prestigious Hispano-Arabic tradition with which it shared Iberian soil for some several centuries. However, as Eleazar Gutwirth points out in his discussion of Romance-language letter writing in the Jewish communities of medieval Iberia, there is resistance in certain quarters of Judaic studies to evidence that “does not support either a perception of Jewish culture as ‘isolated’ nor one which postulates an unchanging ‘semitism’ which is itself unaffected by the context of peninsular history” (2000, 208). Ángel Sáenz-Badillos has likewise questioned the validity of critical approaches that minimize or ignore altogether the vernacular social contexts of Hebrew literature:

Debería haberse superado en las últimas décadas una perspectiva cargada de peso ideológico y nacionalista, que no ve en todo el periodo sino un capítulo más de la historia cultural del pueblo judío, pero no estoy seguro que esa superación se haya producido en todos los casos, ya que todavía se publican estudios elaborados desde puntos de vista y categorías totalmente exclusivistas, prescindiendo de cualquier otro punto de referencia que no sean las propias fuentes judías (2001, 139).⁶

Most recently, Israeli scholars Tova Rosen and Eli Yassif have drawn attention to the lack of scholarly work done on the relationship between Hebrew and Romance literatures, noting that there are currently but a “few isolated studies, with merely tentative conclusions,” and that “a more precise and general picture is yet to be drawn” (261). This line of thinking has begun to resonate in North America as well. In his recent book on Hebrew literature in transition between al-Andalus and Christian Iberia, Jonathan Decter makes a number of sustained insights into the relationship between medieval Hebrew rhymed prose narratives and the French Romance in an attempt to disabuse his colleagues in Judaic studies of the idea that “medieval Jews were seldom influenced by the intellectual trends of Christendom, where Jews were generally more insular and isolated” (121). He concludes that “we must unlearn or

⁵ In an article on the role of Hebrew poetry in Spanish literary history, Ángel Sáenz-Badillos maintains that some of the Hispano-Hebrew poets rank “a la altura de los mejores poetas del Medioevo” (1997, 405).

⁶ On this problem see also Doron 2000, 215.

rethink some of the dominant academic narratives that discount *a priori* the possibility of European influence over Hebrew writing” (123).

Despite these instances of intellectual neglect within Judaic studies and among Peninsular Hispanists, there is a rising tide of interest in the Hebrew literature of Christian Iberia among Hispanists working in North America. María Rosa Menocal, for example, has described Hispano-Hebrew literature as “part of a Spanish tradition defined now as being multifaceted and encompassing languages that would later be rejected and exiled” (2004, 70-71). The cultural studies turn in literary scholarship has led many to rethink key assumptions about national literatures that have defined the field since the 19th century. This turn coincides with the arrival of Jewish culture into the US mainstream and renewed interest in Middle Eastern and Semitic studies due to current events.⁷ All of the above, in addition to a spike in interest in Latino and Sephardic topics among the US Jewish community adds up to something of groundswell.

Whether motivated by the current climate or by their own personal proclivities, scholars today who study the Hebrew literature of Christian Spain in its Romance context are not working totally *ex nihilo*, but rather have the good fortune of being able to stand on the shoulders of some accomplished Hebraists. As we will see below, the late Hayyim Schirmann, Don of Hispano-Hebrew literary studies in Israel, made frequent note of correspondences and coincidences with Romance literature where other Hebraists were not able or inclined to comment. In a study of the Provençal Hebrew poet Isaac Ha-Gorni, he asserts that

a coté des modèles hébreux, il existait d’ailleurs pour lui une autre source importante d’inspiration: la poésie chrétienne du midi de la France et du nord de l’Espagne, où fleurissait alors le lyrisme des troubadours. Les Juifs assimilaient toujours davantage la culture profane de leur entourage; il existait bien parmi eux de rares érudits connaissant l’arabe, mais la plupart des lettrés l’ignoraient. (1949, 177)

He continues this line of thought in a series of comments scattered throughout his seminal anthology *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence* in which he indicates points of comparison and speculates on cases of probable influence between Romance and Hebrew literatures. His student Dan Pagis has likewise made several sustained observations on the relationship between Hebrew and Romance authors and texts, most notably in his studies on the Hebrew literature of Italy.⁸ Aviva Doron published a monograph dedicated to the Alfonsine courtly context of the poet Todros Abulafia (1989). Since then, however, few and scattered studies of the matter have appeared.

⁷ On Madonnah and Kabbalah, see B. Huss; on Joe Lieberman, see Kellman; Bronner.

⁸ See, for example, Pagis’ comments on the Italian context of the poetry of Immanuel of Rome, where he notes that Immanuel wrote in the then-current *dolce stil nuovo* forms used by Italian writers such as the sonnet, *terza rima*, and *ottavina* (1991, 58-59).

Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, in an overview of the last fifty years of scholarship on medieval Hebrew literature, sums up this state of affairs:

Si por considerarse una época ‘epigonal’ se le ha dedicado mucha menos atención que al periodo andalusí propiamente dicho, bien sea por cuestiones de planteamiento ideológico, o por desconocimiento de las literaturas romances, los primeros pasos dados por Schirmann en esta dirección apenas han tenido eco y continuación entre los estudiosos de la literatura hebrea. . . . Se tiende a ver la obra de toda esta época más desde una perspectiva interna de evolución de la literatura hebrea que desde un verdadero entendimiento de esta creación literaria en el entorno cultural en el que nació. (2001, 159)

In the following year, Eli Yassif and Tova Rosen echo Sáenz Badillos’ comments:

The conjecture (expressed repeatedly by both scholars [Schirmann and Pagis], and by others as well) that, starting from the thirteenth century, Hebrew poetry and rhymed prose interacted with Romance literatures (Provençal, Catalanian, and Castilian) has been heretofore explored in a few isolated studies, with merely tentative conclusions (Doron 1989; Scheindlin 1997; Sáenz Badillos 1997).⁹ A more precise and general picture is yet to be drawn, and the field awaits comparative studies by scholars well versed in Hebrew and Romance languages. We can only assume such a contribution would come from contemporary Spain, which hosts an active centre of research in the field of medieval Hebrew poetry. Unlike its Israeli and American counterparts, the Spanish research community includes many non-Jewish scholars, who view medieval Hebrew poetry as an integral layer in Spain’s multilingual and multicultural history. (261)

If this is indeed the case, these Spanish scholars (with the exceptions noted above by Sáenz-Badillos and Targarona Borrás) have yet to take up the challenge of Rosen and Yassif. As they indicate, it is true that a number of Spanish Hebraists have been pursuing robust research agendas in Hispano-Hebrew,¹⁰ but they tend to focus on the edition and translation into Castilian of primary texts, and a critical voice that can engage the prevailing cultural and theoretical critical discussion in North America has yet to emerge from Spain. It remains to be seen whether Spain, Israel, or North America will emerge as a center of Hebrew/Romance studies.

⁹ To this we would add Doron (2000), Targarona Borrás (1985), Sáenz-Badillos (2000 and 2002) and Wacks (2005).

¹⁰ See the editions and translations brought together by Sáenz Badillos (2001, 156-61).

Jewish Writers and the Hispano-Romance Vernacular: *Historia de una inseguridad*¹¹

We have mentioned that although Jewish writers of Christian Iberia overwhelmingly favored Hebrew as a literary language (at least as it appears from the texts that we have available), it is clear that they were intimately familiar with the vernacular culture of their times, both popular and literary. While Hispano-Hebrew authors almost never comment directly on specific vernacular writers or texts,¹² they do occasionally make mention of the Romance dialects of the Peninsula. Most commonly they are identified as Christian or Roman languages, occasionally by inference from Biblical reference to Edomite, and occasionally Aramaic.

It is by now well established that al-Andalus was a multilingual society in which the Andalusí Romance dialects were spoken and written alongside Arabic and Hebrew. A number of Muslim Andalusí authors testify to a proliferation of dialects of Andalusí Romance, and Jewish Andalusí authors writing in both Hebrew and Arabic follow suit. Scholars are in almost unanimous agreement that Andalusí Jews, along with their Christian and Muslim counterparts, were familiar with and conversant in Hispano-Romance.¹³

Jewish voices from Medieval Iberia tend toward the negative when speaking of the literary vernacular. They characterize literary Hispano-Romance generally as a Christian endeavor, inveigh against its cultivation by Jewish authors, and champion the use of Hebrew as the correct vehicle for Jewish literary expression. Jewish literary practice tells a slightly different story. Even if we focus on Hebrew-language production, we see that Jewish writers in Christian Iberia were full participants in their native vernacular culture, and they make free use of the same themes, motifs, techniques, and genres as their Christian neighbors.

In the 11th century, Shelomo ibn Gabirol lamented the sorry state of Hebrew letters amongst the Jews of Zaragoza, noting that “half of them talk the language of the Christians (*adomit*), and the other half Arabic (*bilšon bene kedar*)” (1: 376, v. 8). And while Ibn Gabirol does not go so far as to accuse these Jews of writing in Romance, we can imagine that some of them must have done so. Not long after Ibn Gabirol’s

¹¹ This phrase is Américo Castro’s title for the first chapter of his *España en su historia* (1983). I have also used it to describe the history of *Libro de buen amor* criticism with particular reference to the role of the Hebrew *maqama* (Wacks 2007, 174).

¹² In one interesting exception, Schirmann notes that Abraham Habedershi does in fact mention some of the Provençal troubadours by name (1949, 178).

¹³ Ribera (with reference to Simonet 24) writes that a series of Andalusí authors, such as “Abenbuclaris, en Zaragoza, Abenjoljol, en Córdoba, Abenalbeitar, en Málaga, repetidamente aluden al latín vulgar que se habla en nuestra tierra, dando a entender que es la lengua romance que hablan musulmanes y judíos. Hasta insisten en distinguir dialectos especiales de una ciudad, de una provincia o de una región, apellidándolos romance de Valencia, de Zaragoza, de Aragón” (Ribera 12) Samuel Stern maintains that it “might almost be taken for granted” that Andalusí Jews “made everyday use of the Mozarabic [Romance] of its Muslim and Christian neighbors” (1974, 151).

death, Hebrew poets indeed did begin to include snippets of Andalusí Romance in some of their *muwaššahs*, the result being the very problematic and notoriously controversial *kharjas*.¹⁴ These tentative couplets in Andalusí Romance, often inextricably mixed with Andalusí Arabic, whether actual representations of a popular lyric tradition or fanciful inventions of Hebrew and Arabic poets, have been singled out as evidence of a written Romance literary tradition that predates troubadour lyric by the better part of a century. As it turns out, there were by the 12th century Jewish poets who were going quite a bit farther than merely peppering Hebrew compositions with ‘popular’ ditties in Romance. Maimonides makes a fairly incidental observation (deftly exploited by Monroe 1980) that would have made Ibn Gabirol turn in his grave. According to Maimonides, not only did Andalusí Jews share a common spoken Romance vernacular with their Christian and Muslim neighbors, some of them went so far as to compose serious poetry in this vernacular! These compositions were sung alongside similar *muwaššahs* and *zajals* (strophic poems) in Arabic and Hebrew. In an obscure passage of one of his many exegetical works, Maimonides makes mention of poetic gatherings in which Jewish poets sing *muwaššahs* in Hebrew, Arabic, and ‘*ajamiyya* (non-Arabic vernacular), which in the Peninsular setting can be only Andalusí Romance.¹⁵ Since Maimonides left Spain in 1160, this means that among Spanish Jews, Hebrew poetic practice existed in dialogue with Romance at least as early as the mid-12th century, and probably longer, though it is scarcely documented.

Aside from these examples, Hebrew authors of the 11th and 12th centuries are far more occupied with the relationship between Hebrew and the then-dominant Classical Arabic than with Romance. However, by the end of the 13th century, with Castilian and Catalan well established as languages of courtly literature, they begin to distinguish Hebrew from Romance. Isaac ibn Sahula, for example, claims that his poetry will “blot out the songs of the Christians” (5, v. 6), and by the middle of the 14th century, Samuel ibn Sasson refers to literary Romance as “their language” (76, no. 44, v. 2), and not ‘ours.’ After the violence of 1391, Hebrew-voiced critiques of the literary vernacular become more strident still; Solomon ben Meshullam De Piera, who was active in Zaragoza in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, refers to vernacular poets quite bluntly as “babblers” (De Piera 89, v. 47), and elsewhere compares them to monkeys attempting to play tambourines and flutes (Targarona Borrás 2000, 180, vv. 12-13). As relations between Jews and Christians became increasingly strained, Hebrew poets stepped up and put a point on their critiques of Romance literary

¹⁴ We will not attempt a complete bibliography of *kharja* scholarship here. One might begin with the overview of Armistead (1987), which references his many studies on the topic. See also his more recent articles (Armistead 2003, Armistead 2005). The annotated bibliography of Heijkoop and Zwartjes gives a thorough overview. The Romance *kharjāt* of Halevi have been edited by Stern (1948).

¹⁵ James Monroe explains that ‘*ajamiyya*, meaning ‘non-Arabic,’ in Eastern contexts can refer to Persian, Syriac, or other non-Arabic languages of the Near East, but on the Iberian Peninsula can only refer to Andalusí Romance (1988-89, 21-22). The Andalusí Botanist Ibn al-Baythar (Malaga, 10th c.) refers to Hispano-Romance as other *latiniyya* (Latin), the ‘*ajamiyya* of al-Andalus (Simonet xxv), while Ibn Juljul (Cordova, 10th c.) cites *latini`amiyy*, or Vulgar Latin (Simonet xxiv n 4).

practice, especially among Jewish (or formerly Jewish) writers. By and large, however, they dedicated far more energy to cultivating and exalting Hebrew than they did to denigrating Romance as a literary language.

The Hebrew *Maqama*¹⁶

At the end of the so-called “Golden Age” of Hebrew poetic production, just about the time that the Christian conquest of al-Andalus was nearing the critical turning point of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), Hebrew writers began to cultivate in Spain the *maqama* genre. It was invented in 9th century Baghdad by a Persian convert to Islam, Badi` al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (967-1007), then popularized in the early 12th century by another Persian Arabic writer, Abu Muhammad ibn Qasim al-Hariri, whose *maqamat* became an important classic of Arabic literature.

The ‘classical’ *maqama* consists of a series (usually 50) of unrelated episodes featuring the exploits of the narrator, who is repeatedly duped by the rogue antagonist, who appears in each episode disguised as one or another marginal character, beggar, drifter, street preacher, and the like. At the end of each *maqama*, the rogue reveals his true identity and sings (or sometimes leaves behind in written form) a short poem to his victim before slipping away. The plots of these *maqamat* tended to be skeletal, with the real emphasis on the high-flying rhetoric and rare elocutions placed in the mouth of the rogue character, who dazzles the narrator with his verbal and poetic skill.

Hebrew writers mimicked the Arabic genre’s stylistic and formal characteristics very closely in the beginning, but later introduced innovations both formal and thematic absent in the works of al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri. In Spain, Judah al-Harizi, Joseph ibn Zabara, and Judah ibn Shabbetai (among others) all wrote *maqamat* (Heb. *mahbarot*, sing. *mahberet*) during the formative period of the genre in Hebrew.

Since its inception, the Arabic and then Hebrew *maqama* has always been a site of boundary crossing, transgression, and cultural transition. Al-Hamadhani’s 10th-century innovation was, to a certain extent, a product of the transition between Sassanid and `Abbasid Baghdad. In al-Andalus, the Arabic *maqamat* of Muhammad al-Saraqusti (composed 1143) were the literary expression of an Arabic litterati rendered nearly obsolete by the fundamentalist Almohad regime of the 12th-13th centuries, who put an end to the literary brinksmanship of the Taifa kings that had fueled the extraordinary florescence of Arabic letters during the late 11th and early 12th centuries. James Monroe has written that the Andalusi *maqama* was “a counter-genre to noble literary genres” (2002, 3), and “the literature of outsiders who are no longer welcome at court” (2002, 12).

This relationship between literary genre and socio-political transition or rupture is not a uniquely Iberian phenomenon. The Hebrew *maqama* is part of a wider, late-medieval phenomenon witnessed in Iberia, Europe and the Maghreb, of prose fiction

¹⁶ For an overview of the *maqama* genre in medieval Iberia, see Drory (2000) and Monroe (2002, 1-17). For a comprehensive history of the genre, see Hämeen-Anttila.

genres that break with literary and social conventions, and address these transgressions directly in their subject matter. Hamilton writes that in al-Andalus, the “world al-Saraqusti creates for the reader in the *Maqamat al-Luzumiyah* is one in which traditional moral values are inverted” (Hamilton 45). Specifically, the genre grew and adapted due to the need to express “linguistic, cultural, and religious differences” (Hamilton 46). In this regard the *maqama* is in good company with other works of rhyming prose mixed with poetry of the same era, such as the Arabic *Hadith Bayad wa-Riyad* (‘The Tale of Bayad and Riyad’, Granada or Maghreb, 12th century), or the French ‘chanteuble’ *Aucassin et Nicolette* (12th century) (C. Robinson 2; Schirmann 1962, 295).

In contrast to their Muslim Andalusian counterparts, the Hebrew writers of Christian Iberia (with rare exceptions such as we shall see) enjoyed courtly patronage only secondarily. Often their work was underwritten by wealthy Jewish courtiers, as was the case with Joseph ibn Zabara, whose patron Sheshet Benveniste was court physician to Alfonso II and Pedro II of Aragon. Accordingly, the Hebrew *maqama* did not reflect the same socio-economic realities lived by Arabic (or Hebrew) writers in al-Andalus.¹⁷ According to Michelle Hamilton, while the Andalusian *maqamat* are about challenging courtly authority, the Hebrew *maqamat* are about “interrogating a competing set of cultural discourses” (2007, 52). Because the Hebrew *maqama* flourished under Christian rule, it follows that these competing discourses are those of the Jews of al-Andalus and of Christian Iberia respectively. Raymond Scheindlin sees the Hebrew *maqama* as a bridge between these two cultural moments, a sort of artistic record of the community’s transition from Islamic to Christian rule (2002, 377). His student Jonathan Decter greatly expanded and nuanced this approach to the material, and emphasizes that the Hebrew *maqama* is very much about the cultural problematics of transition from al-Andalus to Christian Iberia (199-200). The development of the Hebrew *maqama* genre slightly precedes and overlaps with the early flowering of the Hispano-Romance literary vernacular, and critics have observed (or at least suggested) that at least some of this innovation can be attributed to imitation of ‘Christian’ (i.e., Romance), namely the Chivalric romance and Troubadour poetry (Decter 119-20). To a certain extent, and certainly for Decter, Romance-language literature is part of the cultural world of the authors of Hebrew *maqamat* and needs to be taken into account in any serious assessment of their work.

For Raymond Scheindlin (1986), this influence begins in the first half of the 12th century, in the *maqama* of Ibn Saqbel, whose protagonist’s amorous tribulations are more characteristic of the generic conventions of the French romance or of the Troubadours than of Arabic poetry or prose. In addition to this discussion of common thematics Doron (2000, 225-26) has attempted to relate the flourishing of the didactic *mester de clerecía* verse genre to the rhymed prose of the Hebrew *maqama*. As with

¹⁷ Ayelet Oettinger points out that while previous Arabic and Hebrew literature had depended on courtly patronage, Judah al-Harizi’s satire of the courtier class suggests a shift in patronage patterns (91).

the question of the articulation in Hebrew of the conventions of Romance amatory genres (in studies of Jacob Ben Eleazar and Todros Abulafia mentioned below), the more convincing approach is focusing less on formal considerations such as versification and more on how Hebrew authors refract the literary concepts and themes of their times.¹⁸ This is likely to be the more productive line of inquiry as the research on Hebrew and Romance moves forward. What follows here is a series of brief sketches of authors of Hebrew *maqamat* of the late 12th and early 13th century, along with some observations on the relationship of their works to the Hispano-Romance (and in some cases Latin) literature of their times.

Judah al-Harizi's *Tahkemoni*

Judah al-Harizi was born in Toledo in the mid 12th century, over a full century after Alfonso VI conquered the city for Castile-León. He spent many years traveling throughout the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean basin, where he was disturbed by the lack of dedication to Hebrew learning and high levels of assimilation to Arab literary culture. He distinguished himself as a skilled translator of Arabic, and translated both Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* (Ar. *Dalalat al-Ha'irin*, Heb. *Moreh Nevukhim*) as well as al-Hariri's *maqamat* into Hebrew. He then wrote an original *maqama* in Hebrew, giving the title *Tahkemoni*.¹⁹ Al-Harizi's *maqama* was true to the structural features set forth by al-Hamadani and al-Hariri, but his work also reflects his particular situation as a Jew writing the transition from al-Andalus to Christian Iberia.

Despite this multicultural background, and perhaps due to ideological considerations,²⁰ critics have not paid much attention to al-Harizi's involvement with the Latin and Romance literatures of the Iberian Peninsula (and beyond). Ayelet Oettinger argues that al-Harizi's Christian social context is particularly evident in the many examples of satire in *Tahkemoni* that are far more resonant with Christian

¹⁸ On the value of this approach, consider the following comment of Ángel Sáenz Badillos on the work of poet Solomon Bonafed: "Hay [en su obra] pequeños rasgos y detalles en los que podemos sospechar que se da algo más que una mera coincidencia, una posible influencia de la literatura romance, o raíces comunes enclavadas en la atmósfera literaria de la época. Temas como el de 'la rosa entre espinas,' 'el mundo al revés' (especialmente en su relación con la muerte), o 'la alabanza del campo' pueden verse como puntos notables de coincidencia con las literaturas romances de la Península Ibérica de la misma época" (2002, 14).

¹⁹ See the Hebrew edition of Zamora and Toporovsky (al-Harizi 1952), the literal prose English translation by Reichert (al-Harizi 1965), the English rhyming prose translation (with excellent notes and analyses) by Segal (al-Harizi 2001), the complete Castilian translation by Del Valle Rodríguez (al-Harizi 1986), and the excerpts translated into Castilian by Navarro Peiro (100-22).

²⁰ Al-Harizi is considered one of the great classical authors of Hebrew prose and as such critics, especially those working in Israel, have emphasized the "Jewishness" of his writing. More recently Hebraists have paid closer attention to the Arabic literary background to his work (see, for example, Sadan 1996 and 2002), but apart from Oettinger there are no studies of the "Christian" or Romance contexts of the *Tahkemoni*.

estates satire than from Hebrew or Arabic literature. She points out, for example, that al-Harizi's satire of social classes and types is far more systematic and universal than previously seen in Arabic or Hebrew (89). Perhaps most convincing is the fact that al-Harizi includes a satire of the *kohen* (priest), a class "that had practically no active ritual role in the Diaspora" (91), and who appears most likely in imitation of Christian satires of Catholic priests, which abound in medieval literature. She also notes that the Christian-dominant context of al-Harizi's Toledo means that references to specifically "Arab" characters are meant to target Arabic cultural traits or behaviors, a focus she claims has no precedent in Hebrew but is certainly present in works by Christian authors (94-5).²¹ Apart from these considerations, what is most interesting about al-Harizi from the point of view of Hispanic studies is that he is representative of the type of Jewish intellectual who would be instrumental in the translation efforts of first Archbishop Raymond (12th century) and Alfonso X (13th century).

Joseph ibn Zabara's *Sefer Sha`ashu`im* ('Book of Delights')

Ibn Zabara, who lived in Barcelona at the end of the 12th century and beginning of the 13th, and like al-Harizi (and many if not all of the authors discussed here) practiced medicine in that city, was author of a Hebrew *maqama* titled *Sefer Sha`ashu`im*.²² Ibn Zabara's work has particular interest for Hispanists because it is thought by some to have influenced Juan Ruiz in the composition of the now hypercanonical *Libro de buen amor* (Lida de Malkiel 1961, 21-25; 1969, 21-30; 1971 31-36; Wacks 2007, 144-74). Like al-Harizi, Ibn Zabara lived in Christian-ruled territory, but unlike Toledo, Barcelona had been under Christian rule for several centuries by the time Ibn Zabara was born. It is most likely that Ibn Zabara (like al-Harizi and other Hebrew authors living in Christian kingdoms) was familiar with the Romance literature of the times, and Judith Dishon has discussed sections of the work in light of the dispute literature of the Middle Ages (198-99). Moses Hadas, in the introduction to his English translation, points out a number of tales in *Sefer Sha`ashu`im* that have analogues in medieval Latin and Romance collections of *exempla*. He notes that one tale in particular, that of the Washerwoman and the Demon (1914, 129-41; 1960, 156-60), has several analogues in Christian collections, but the one that most resembles Ibn Zabara's version is *exemplo* no. XLII of Don Juan Manuel's *Conde Lucanor* ('la falsa beguina'). Despite the strong similarity between the two versions (and that among a

²¹ One high-profile example of a medieval Christian author labeling a character "Muslim" in order to highlight specifically Muslim traits would be the tale of the young man who married a very stong-willed and fierce woman ('una muger muy fuerte e muy brava') in Don Juan Manuel's *Conde Lucanor* (no. 35): "Los moros han por costumbre que adovan de çena a los novios e pónenlas la mesa e déxanlos en su casa fasta otro día" (Juan Manuel 226).

²² See the Hebrew edition by Davidson (Ibn Zabara 1914), the complete English translation by Hadas (Ibn Zabara 1960), the excerpted poems translated into English by Cole (200-202), the Catalan translation of González Llubera (Ibn Zabara 1931), the translation into Castilian of Forteza-Rey (Ibn Zabara 1983), and the excerpts translated into Castilian by Navarro Peiro (123-45).

slew of other versions), Sherwood dismisses the idea that Ibn Zabara's book served as the "original" source for Don Juan Manuel (26). Nonetheless, it is clear that Ibn Zabara's text has certain features in common with the Romance literature of his times, as regards both formal features and raw narrative material.

Judah ibn Shabbetai's *Minhat Yehuda* ('Offering of Judah')

Ibn Shabbetai's *maqama*,²³ roughly contemporaneous with those of al-Harizi and Ibn Zabara, is the (pseudo?) misogynous tale of a young man who proposes to turn his back on women and on family life in order to dedicate himself to study. An astute go-between named Kozbi (one of the several Hebrew and Arabic predecessors of Juan Ruiz's *Trotaconventos* and Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina*) weakens his resolve and sets him up with the beautiful and seductive maiden Ayelet Hashahar ('Hind of the Dawn'), but after the nuptials substitutes a grotesque old hag in her place. *Minhat Yehudah* is part of a series of misogynous and philogynous Hebrew *maqamat* that appeared in the 12th and 13th centuries. Its interest for scholars of Romance literatures is twofold. In the first place it is in some ways a precursor of the debate over women that was carried out in Castilian, Valencian, and Catalan during the 14th and 15th centuries.²⁴ In the second, Ibn Shabbetai's text offers us at least two examples of the interaction of Romance and Hebrew literary practices. Matti Huss, Ibn Shabbetai's modern editor, has suggested that the specific flavor of misogyny expressed in *Minhat Yehudah* is more reminiscent of the Latin motif of *molestiae nuptiarum* than of the Arabic 'wiles of women' motif. He argues that the critique of the institution of marriage, and not on the deceptive behaviors of individual women, echoes the literature of the Christian debate over clerical celibacy.²⁵ In addition to this connection, Ibn Shabbetai sheds a bit of light on the (imagined?) role of the Hebrew author at the court of a Christian monarch. In his introduction to the *maqama*, he describes himself reading his work aloud to "King Alfonso" (VIII) (1991, 2: 33, ll. 779-93). It is difficult to know how we are intended to read this representation. Is it an actual account of a performance of *Minhat Yehudah* before the king (one would imagine with simultaneous paraphrasing into Castilian)? Or is it an ironic description of an implausible event, given that it was unlikely that the king understood any Hebrew? Whichever is the case, it shows that Ibn Shabbetai was at the very least

²³ Cole (205) dates the work to either 1188 or 1208. See the partial edition of Schirmann (1956, 2: 67-86) and the complete edition of Huss, the excerpts translated into English by Cole (206-07), and Navarro Peiro's Castilian translation of select excerpts (169-94) and the complete text (Ibn Shabbetai 2006).

²⁴ On misogyny in Hebrew literature, see Pagis (1986), Fishman, Rosen (103-23) and Jacobs. For studies on Castilian and Catalan literature see Matulka (5-37), Muriel Tapia, and Archer.

²⁵ See Ibn Shabbetai (1991, 55ff, cited in Decter 119). In her discussion of Jewish authors' (and especially Ibn Shabbetai's) familiarity with the Christian writings on sexuality, Tova Rosen writes that "it is likely that the controversies around marriage which plagued Catholicism at this period were known to Ibn Shabbetai and other Jewish intellectuals" (120).

thinking about the position of his work at court, and that he did not consider his own literary practice to be totally irrelevant or isolated from the institutions of temporal power in Castile.

Jacob Ben Eleazar

Jacob ben Eleazar lived in Toledo during the first half of the 13th century. He was active in Jewish intellectual circles and was responsible for translating the Arabic frame tale *Kalila wa-Dimna* into Hebrew some fifty years before Alfonso X commissioned the Castilian translation. He was precisely the kind of Jewish scholar who would later collaborate in the Alfonsine translation project. In addition, and like his elder contemporary Judah al-Harizi, he moved from translating canonical works of Arabic prose fiction (we have a fragmentary Hebrew translation of *Kalila wa-Dimna* by him) to writing original works in Hebrew. His original collection of stories in Hebrew, titled *Sefer Ma'asim* ('The Book of Tales' or, alternatively, *Sipure Ahava* 'Love Stories'), sits at the intersection of Arabic and Romance narrative and thus emblematic of the Hebrew literary practices of Toledo's Jewish community in the first centuries of Christian rule.²⁶ His collection of stories is not really a *maqama*; it is written in a mix of rhyming prose and verse but lacks the other structural features common to the genre: the narrator/rogue diad, the unrelated episodic structure, the emphasis on disguise and discovery. If anything it more resembles frame tale narratives such as *Kalila wa-Dimna* and *Conde Lucanor*. What sets it apart from most collections of short narrative of its time is its representation of amorous relationships. While collections popular in 12th and 13th century Iberia, such as *Sendebār* or *Kalila*, tended to focus on amorous deceptions (see our remarks above on the 'wiles of women' motif common to Arabic literature in Ibn Shabbetai's *Minhat Yehudah*), the love relationships depicted in Ben Eleazar's collection are more reminiscent of the French romance or European novella. Hayim Schirmann emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the characters' love relationships, and the active role of the women in them. These women are not the haughty, fickle love objects of the troubadours, but are active participants whose words and actions are central to the narrative (1962, 295). Dan Pagis, who became one of the foremost authorities on the Hebrew literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, noted that the communities that produced the Hebrew *maqamat* were not knowledgeable in (spoken) Arabic, but were native speakers of the Romance languages, and were familiar with the emergent literatures in those languages. According to Pagis this was particularly true in the case of Ben Eleazar's *Love Stories* (1976, 220-21). Jonathan Decter adds, in the course of his very astute analysis of Ben Eleazar's text, that while the social world and values Eleazar represents is quite different from those of the French romance (tournaments, quests,

²⁶ See the partial Hebrew edition and study by Schirmann (1962), the complete Hebrew edition of David (Ben Eleazar 1992), the English translation of excerpted poems by Cole (205-07), and the Castilian translation of excerpted tales by Navarro Peiro (209-31).

etc.), the narrative sensibility and dynamic characterization owe more to Chrétien de Troyes than to *Kalila wa-Dimna* or, for example, al-Harizi's *Tahkemoni*.²⁷ Perhaps even more revealing of what we might call a 'European' literary sensibility in the *Love Stories* is the section he includes on the geography of the Islamic world that is more like that in the French *Aucassin and Nicolette* (12th century) than, for example, the Arabic or Hebrew *maqamat*.

Alfonsine Literary Culture: Ibn Sahula and Todros Abulafia

Alfonso X 'The Learned' is well remembered, even lionized, as a patron of arts and letters. His efforts to make Arabic (and to a lesser extent, Hebrew) learning available at his court is one of the most important chapters in the early development of Castilian as a literary language (Wacks 2007, 94-103). Even before he ascended to the throne he commissioned a Castilian translation of the very popular Arabic work of prose fiction, *Kalila wa-Dimna*. He underwrote (some say directed) translations of scores of scientific works, and commissioned (some say wrote himself), original works of law (*Siete partidas*), history (*General estoria*), and devout poetry (*Cantigas de Santa Maria*) (Gómez-Redondo XX-XXX).

The Alfonsine project has been described as a kind of intellectual Reconquest or perhaps *translatio studii* (Cárdenas; Rodríguez Llopis and Estepa Díez 29), the porting of science and learning from Arabic to Castilian. But like the historical study of the Christian conquest of al-Andalus, the question of the development of the Alfonsine literary vernacular is less an 'us vs them' situation than a nuanced, layered negotiation of language choice and literary practice. In the first stage, that of the Arabic-Hebrew translations of the Ibn Tibbon family and others, Hebrew negotiated its way through fields and genres once the sole province of Arabic.²⁸ This brought secular learning into Hebrew practice (1100-1200). The children of this generation of translators collaborated with Alfonso to duplicate the exercise, this time into Castilian.²⁹ This means that the Arabic-Hebrew project would have provided the models and the habits of thought for the Arabic-Castilian project. Alfonso's achievement was not simply the translation of Arabic to Castilian; it was the adaptation of translation methods, and in a broader sense, of ways of thinking about and producing knowledge.³⁰

²⁷ "Ben Elazar does not create protagonists who embark upon chivalrous forest adventures or engage in tournaments to earn love and prestige. Yet his characters do embody the internal transformations characteristic of Romance protagonists" (Decter 156).

²⁸ On the Tibbonid translations, see J. Robinson.

²⁹ "It is interesting to note that the Alfonsine translation project, undertaken to promote Castilian as a language of secular learning, was initiated as the Arabic-Hebrew translation movement was concluding. The Jewish translators who worked under Alfonso's direction belonged to the generation following that of the Jewish translators (such as the Ibn Tibbon family and Judah al-Harizi) who had worked to promote Hebrew as a language of secular learning. From a socio-cultural approach, the two are simply phases in a single movement, a concept deserving further investigation" (Wacks 2005, 424 n 53).

³⁰ On the larger significance of the Alfonsine translation project, see Menocal (2006).

The introduction of official vernacular literature created a secular literature not just in terms of its content, but in that for the first time there was literature being written in a language to which no single religious tradition could lay claim definitively. Granted there was plenty of Christian literature in the vernacular. It is well known that the need to preach in the vernacular (and the subsequent legitimation of secular preaching at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215) was a great factor in the development of a literary vernacular in Spain and elsewhere in Europe. But unlike Berceo's Christian didacticism in his works of *clerecía*, Alfonso's project was (largely) proto-Humanistic in that it did not purport to promulgate specifically Christian knowledge, nor to communicate with a specifically Christian (or potentially Christian) audience. But Castilian was common to all subjects of the Crown of Castile and León, a royal and soon to be imperial language. Any Castilian speaker with enough patience to learn the Roman alphabet could read (or listen to) learned literature in Castilian, provided they had access to manuscripts.³¹

The two Hebrew authors of the Alfonsine era of importance to the present discussion were Isaac ibn Sahula and the poet Todros ben Yosef Halevi Abulafia. At first glance they would seem to inhabit different worlds: Abulafia was a financier and court poet who enjoyed the patronage of Alfonso X himself and penned salacious, at times scandalous love poems; Ibn Sahula was a kabbalist and self-avowed traditionalist who aimed to curb cultural assimilation through a renewal of Hebrew learning in secular fields such as science and philosophy. They are bound, however, by a common vernacular culture and by their relationships, however disparate, to the courtly culture of their times.

Isaac Ibn Sahula

Isaac Ibn Sahula lived in Castile during the second half of the 13th century. He is the author of several kabbalistic works, including a commentary on the Song of Songs (Green 1987).³² His magnum opus, however, is *Meshal Haqadmoni* ('Fable of the Old Timer'),³³ a framed collection of short narrative and treatises on various scientific and philosophical topics, written in rhyming prose interspersed with verse. The work is best known for being the first text to make mention of fellow Castilian Moses of León's *Zohar*, a foundational work of kabbalah. *Meshal Haqadmoni* is organized (like *Kalila wa-Dimna* and the *Conde Lucanor* after it) as a discussion between two characters, the Cynic and the Moralist.

In his introduction (see above), Ibn Sahula repeats the call of al-Harizi to rally around the cause of Hebrew letters, endangered by Jewish interest in Arabic and

³¹ On this question see also Wacks (forthcoming, "Vernacular").

³² Loewe includes a bibliography of Ibn Sahula in his edition of *Meshal Haqadmoni* (xv-xxi).

³³ See the excerpts edited by Schirmann (1956, 2: 349-412), the (faulty) edition by Zamora (Ibn Sahula 1953), the English translation of Loewe (Ibn Sahula 2004), and the English translations of the tale of the Sorcerer by Scheindlin (1990) and Wacks (2004).

Castilian books.³⁴ Despite his protestations, by the late 13th century it is fairly clear that writing in Hebrew does not entail rejection of vernacular culture per se, even if Hebrew remains the preferred literary vehicle. While Ibn Sahula advocates a Hebrew-only policy for his fellow Jews,³⁵ he does not hesitate to borrow from non-Hebrew sources, whether vernacular, Arabic, or Latin (Wacks 2005).

Neither does his dedication to Hebrew as a literary language mean that Ibn Sahula turned his gaze away from the greater Christian society in which he lived. We should in no way mistake his nationalism for atavism or escapism. Like today's traditionalists, Ibn Sahula did not shun modern society; he chose to participate in it in hopes of promoting his own particular ideological program. In Ibn Sahula's case, this meant an emphasis on traditional rabbinic Judaism with a strong kabbalist bent, and a proto-nationalist appeal (similar to that of al-Harizi) to his readers to turn away from Arabic and Castilian literature and to cultivate Hebrew as language of both secular and Jewish learning (Loewe lxx and c). Raphael Loewe suggests that a substantial segment of *Meshal Haqadmoni* can be read as a political allegory for the Castilian court of Ibn Sahula's day (lxxxvi-ci), which means that (if we accept Loewe's reading) his interest in courtly affairs was not limited to the type of gallantry or scandalmongering associated with his contemporary Todros Abulafia, but rather took the shape of serious political commentary. This engagement with current courtly culture, taken together with Ibn Sahula's Hebrew linguistic nationalism in the context of the vernacularization program of Alfonso X, means that although Ibn Sahula may have shunned the literary vernacular in theory, his practice was very much engaged with vernacular literary practice and the court from which it emanated.

Todros Abulafia

At the same court and at practically the same time, a very different kind of Hebrew writer was participating much more directly in Alfonsine literary culture. Todros Abulafia, author of an extensive corpus of Hebrew poetry, *Gan hameshalim ve-hahidot* ('The Garden of Saws and Parables'),³⁶ enjoyed the direct patronage of Alfonso X, and his *diwan* contains a number of poems addressed to the King himself.³⁷ Abulafia is a rare if not unique case of a Jewish poet writing in Hebrew under royal

³⁴ Raphael Loewe writes that "it was Ibn Sahula's object to widen socially this degree of competence [in Hebrew], and thus to encourage use of the Hebrew versions of scientific texts, where such existed, rather than the corresponding Arabic ones, as well as weaning the Jewish reading public off Arabic and Spanish *belles-lettres*" (lxx).

³⁵ "For Ibn Sahula, as for any Jew, the linguistic expression of ethnic identity had of course to be Hebrew" (Loewe lxix).

³⁶ See the complete edition of Yellin; the selections edited by Schirmann (1956, 2: 414-38) the English translations of selected poems by Carmi (410-16) and Cole (256-69).

³⁷ See the comments of Targarona Borrás on poems dedicated to Alfonso X (1985, 208-210). On Todros ben Yehuda Abulafia's poems in praise of his older relative, the influential Rabbi Todros ben Yosef Abulafia, see also Sáenz Badillos (1999).

Christian patronage, and his poetry, like that of the Provençal and Galician-Portuguese troubadours at Alfonso's court (Alvar), is not typically included in scholarly overviews of the literary scene at the court of the Learned King.³⁸

Hebraists, primarily those working in Israel, have shown progressive interest in the relationship of Abulafia's poetry to that of his Romance-language contemporaries. Schirmann observed (without going into detail) that his poetry displayed certain formal aspects of the work of his Christian contemporaries, but always retained classical Hispano-Arabic prosody (1949, 178-79). Pagis goes a bit further, suggesting that the poetry of Abulafia structurally resembles that of the Troubadours (Pagis 1976, 189). This line is picked up by Sáenz-Badillos' 1996 study on the invective poetry of Abulafia and his contemporary Phinehas Halevi in light of both the Arabic and troubadoursque invective traditions. Sáenz-Badillos concludes that the invective poetry of Abulafia is a sort of hybrid of Andalusí linguistic features and some Romance-influenced ideation and imagery.

Doron (1986, 1989, and somewhat refined in 1992) stresses that the main affinity of Abulafia with his Christian peers is in his individualized, personal poetic voice calling on God to intercede in personal problems (as in the Romance tradition of Marian poetry, especially the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* of Alfonso X 'the Learned') and less like Andalusí Hebrew poets who speak with God as the community's elect and on sublime themes. For Brann, it is the love poetry of Abulafia (and not the devotional poems as per Doron) where he is most innovative, breaking with the stock tropes of Andalusí Hebrew love poetry and "cultivat[ing] the persona of the libertine" who writes not of stock, archetypical 'gazelles' of the Andalusí school, but rather of specifically Arab, Spanish or Slavic "maidens and wenches" (145). Cole follows Brann, adding that Abulafia "was likely influenced by the troubadour tradition" (275), and adding that Abulafia was especially adept at reinventing, subverting, or simply rejecting many of the formal and stylistic conventions of the Andalusí school (275). While earlier criticism tended to frame Abulafia's innovations in terms of an abandonment of Andalusí Hebrew style, later critics celebrate it as one of the hallmarks of his innovation, perhaps as a measure of his 'western-ness' or as evidence of his poetic assimilation to 'Christian' norms. In general, when critics have written about Abulafia vis-à-vis the Romance language poetry of his times, most have not gone into specific textual detail. The notable exceptions to this rule are the monograph of Doron (1989) and the article of Sáenz-Badillos (1996) on Abulafia's invective poetry. Abulafia's prolific output and the relative scarcity of comparative studies of his work make him an excellent subject for further critical studies, particularly as regards his participation in literary practices in vogue at the court of Alfonso X.

³⁸ Abulafia is absent in Procter's discussion of Provençal and Galician poets of Alfonso's time (130-32), as well as Ba Roth mentions him in passing in his discussion of the Jewish translators who collaborated with Alfonso X (70); O'Callaghan gives an overview of the Galician-Portuguese troubadours active at Alfonso's court (144-46) but does not mention Abulafia; Salvador Martínez makes brief mention of one verse of Abulafia's in his discussion of the detainment of Alfonso's Jewish tax farmers (446 n 44).

After Alfonso: Shem Tov and his circle³⁹

After the massive accomplishments of Alfonso X in establishing Castilian as a productive language of learning and courtly culture (O’Callaghan; Márquez Villanueva 2004; Menocal 2006), and despite the important collaboration of Jewish intellectuals in many of Alfonso’s translations, there was still an almost total lack of Jewish literary voices in the vernacular. Shem Tov ben Isaac Arduziel de Carrión (ca. 1290-1360) (known to students of Castilian literature as Santó or Santob de Carrión) is the very prominent exception, and is a key figure in understanding the relationship between Hebrew and Romance literary practices in the late Middle Ages in Spain.

Shem Tov, who was accomplished in rabbinics, community leadership, and sheep husbandry, is known to scholars of medieval Castilian literature as the author of the *Proverbios morales*, a decidedly secular moral-didactic poem emphasizing the importance of being able to approach a problem from multiple points of view. Since the 15th century, Shem Tov’s *Proverbios* have been celebrated as the first example of gnomic verse in Castilian, and an important work of medieval Castilian literature. The fact that Shem Tov was also the author of a very interesting and innovative Hebrew *maqama* has gone fairly unnoticed by Hispanists until the late 20th century. His *Milhemet ha-’et ve-ha-misparayim* (‘Debate Between the Pen and the Scissors’), when read next to the *Proverbios*, provides the reader with some valuable insights into Shem Tov’s attitude toward the literary vernacular. His case is unique in that he is the only writer to weigh in on the issue of Hebrew and Romance literary practices who is also a known author of *belles lettres* in both languages.

The debate takes place one cold winter’s day in which the narrator’s inkwell freezes solid, so that the narrator breaks his pen’s tip on the hard surface of the frozen ink. The scissors come forward to take the pen’s place, which leads to a debate between the two in which the pen and the scissors both extol the virtues of their respective techniques of writing. Unable to settle their differences, they agree to find a third party to judge which of them is the more fitting utensil. The pen goes out into the town and returns with a wise old man, who is told to look around the house and determine the purpose of each item in it. He picks up the pen and writes with it, then picks up the scissors and uses them to trim his hair, fingernails, and moustache, thus settling the dispute.

Critics have advanced several different allegorical interpretations of the *Debate*, many of which are rooted either in conflicts internal to Castile’s Jewish community and/or in relations with individual Christians and/or the royal court. Jew vs. *converso* (Shepard 31-38), kabbalist vs. rabbinist (Einbinder 270), philosophy vs. religion (Zackin 201-03); some have concluded that the work defies allegorical interpretation

³⁹ On the question of the relationship between Shem Tov’s Hebrew and Castilian writing, see my contribution to the forthcoming special volume of *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* titled “Jewish Spain” and edited by Daniela Flesler, Adrian Pérez Melgosa, & Tabea Linhardt.

(Einbinder 274; Cole 290). I argue that the *Debate* is between Hebrew (Pen) and Romance (Scissors), and that a passage about scissors writing in Shem Tov's *Proverbios* is meant to devalue the literary language of the *Proverbios* itself, and, by extension, the Christian ruler (Pedro I) to whom the work is dedicated. This is not only a rare comment on bilingual (Hebrew/Romance) literary practice, but an equally rare comment on patronage relationships between individual Jewish authors and royal Christian patrons (alongside those of Ibn Shabbetai and Todros Abulafia, above).

Zaragoza poets and Vidal Benvenist's *Efer and Dina*⁴⁰

At the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th a group of Jewish poets, the so-called 'Circle of Poets' that included, among others, Solomon da Piera and Solomon Bonafed, thrived in Zaragoza and the surrounding area (Schirmann 1956, 564; Huss 2003, 5-12; Targarona Borrás and Scheindlin; Scheindlin 1997, 26; Cole 305). These poets lived and worked during a period that has been described variously by historians as one of "terror" (Maccoby 83) and "universal ruin" (Baer 1973, 2: 134). The violent pogroms of 1391 that ravaged the Iberian Peninsula resulted in the deaths of thousands of Jews and the conversion of thousands more.⁴¹ Twenty-two years later, the Disputation of Tortosa occasioned another wave of conversions, including those of many of the religious leaders of the Jewish communities of the Crown of Aragon (Roth 55-61).

The mass conversions and resulting attrition of many of Spain's Jewish communities caused great upset among both Jews and Christians. While for many Jews, the conversions were a prophetic precursor to the total destruction of Sephardic Jewry, for the Old Christians, the sudden influx of newly baptized (and not thoroughly catechized) *conversos* or New Christians blurred the boundaries between "us" and "them" (Nirenberg 153-54; Meyerson 11-12). In both cases, the situation provoked no little anxiety over how this social upheaval would affect the status quo. During this period in which the community lived with the constant threat of violence, the Zaragoza Circle of Poets produced a substantial corpus of Hebrew verse of remarkable linguistic and technical virtuosity, precisely at a time when the future of Jewish letters, and the Jewish community in general, seemed bleak at best. Jewish writers gave voice to this anxiety in at least two ways: what they said, and how they said it. In their poetry, they lament the violence, the conversions, and express their worry over the future of the community. Stylistically, they appeared to retreat into a slavish adherence to the more classical values of the Andalusí school of Hebrew poetry. This was an artistic conservative reaction to a period of acute crisis, in some ways a retreat into the

⁴⁰ For a more detailed study of *Efer and Dina* relative to late medieval vernacular literature, see my contribution to *A Sea of Languages: Literature and Culture in the Pre-modern Mediterranean*, edited by Suzanne Akbari and Karla Mallette, forthcoming from University of Toronto Press.

⁴¹ See Baer (*History* 2: 95-116); Roth (34).

past during a particularly grave present in which some voices blamed the community's downfall on the high levels of assimilation, impiety, and conversion.

By reverting to the style of the 'Golden Age,' the Zaragoza poets perhaps sought to strengthen the core values of the community, much in the way that Ibn Sahula's warning against Arabic and Christian learning came at a time of relative openness (at the court of Alfonso X) and –dramatically so in the case of his contemporary Todros Abulafia– irresponsible, hedonistic secularism. Accordingly, the romance literary vernacular came to be seen as the language that linked the Jewish community with the dominant, often hostile Christian host society. It was the language in which pious Jews were tempted, cajoled, and quite often coerced into conversion.⁴² Vernacular poetry, therefore, was for some a betrayal of the Hebrew language, and by association, of the Jewish community.

One of the younger members of this circle was the poet Vidal Benvenist, a member of the prominent Benvenist/De la Cavallería family, whose members were regulars at court and notables of the Jewish communities of Catalonia and Aragon. We have a good deal of Benvenist's poetry,⁴³ by and large competent, well composed verse that is not very distinct stylistically from that of his peers. We also have a literary debate (Targarona Borrás and Scheindlin 2001) and other writings, including a dirge (Targarona Borrás 2007) composed on the death of his son Solomon. The work of Benvenist that is most important for the comparative study of Hebrew and Romance poetry in Spain is his satiric *maqama*, *Melitsat Efer ve-Dina* ('The Tale of Efer and Dina').

The story goes as follows: Efer is a very wealthy and morally corrupt man of a certain age whose virtuous, long-suffering wife falls ill and passes away. Shortly thereafter, Efer falls desperately in love with the young and lovely Dina. Her father, eager to benefit from his daughter's beauty, arranges for her to marry Efer, who has promised to provide a comfortable lifestyle for both Dina and her father. After the wedding, Efer finds he is unable to perform his conjugal duty. Hoping to mask the truth of his impotence, he obtains an aphrodisiac, and by misadventure, administers himself a fatal overdose.

In a lengthy epilogue, Benveniste explains that his work is meant to be an enjoyable allegorical morality tale in which the arrogance and spiritual decadence of the protagonist lead him to ruin (151, vv. 1-3). The introduction to the first edition suggests that it was meant to be read during festival of Purim, which places *Efer and Dina* in the tradition both of parodies of liturgical and rabbinical works composed for Purim, and in that of the vernacular paraliturgical renderings of the Book of Esther that were prepared for congregants who lacked Hebrew.

⁴² The most notable such example is the exhaustive conversion campaign of Vicente Ferrer, conducted in Castilian, Aragonese, and Valencian (Millás Vallierosa 1950; Vendrell; Sánchez Sánchez; Viera).

⁴³ See Schirmann (1956, 592-619) and Vardi. For *Efer and Dina*, see the excellent edition and study by Huss (Benvenist), the excerpts edited by Schirmann (1956, 2: 603-19), and the selections from Schirmann's edition (1956, 603-19) translated into Castilian by Navarro Peiro (195-207).

Efer and Dina intersects with contemporary vernacular literary practice at several points. First, Benvenist uses the Hebrew term *maase* ('tales') in his title. Other medieval collections so titled contain a number of short narratives that are thematically related to the European *novella*. Some of these *novellas* novelize the same theme of the younger woman forced to marry an older man found in the songs of the *malmaridada* or *malmariee*, with numerous witnesses in Castilian, Catalan, French, and Italian. Alongside this current, there is a tradition of Castilian versions of the Dina story from Genesis, including (among others) a medieval ballad titled *El robo de Dina* that is attested both in early modern collections as well as in modern oral tradition, and a play by Lope de Vega by the same title. Finally, Benvenist's work is a forerunner of Fernando de Rojas' *Celestina* in that it is a hybrid narrative genre (both have been described as tragicomedies) that demonstrates how bourgeois socio-economics subverts traditional models of love and sexuality (courtly values in *Celestina*; rabbinic values in *Efer and Dina*).⁴⁴

Post-Expulsion: Ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah*

The 1492 Expulsion had the paradoxical effect of strengthening and in some ways deproblematizing Spanish Jewish identity. Whereas in Spain, Jews had long been considered second-class subjects of the Spanish crown, and were never welcomed as part of the Spanish national project, in Diaspora they were very strongly identified as Spaniards in the communities where they settled. As we have seen, in the 14th and 15th centuries, Spanish Jews viewed literary Castilian as the language of the dominant Christian culture. In Diaspora however, Castilian was to become a Jewish literary language, and a marker of Jewish identity. By the 17th century, Castilian (along with Portuguese) became a major Jewish literary language that boasted an impressive corpus of poetry, drama, and prose treatises on diverse topics of Jewish interest, including translations of scores of works of exegesis and *musar* (moral treatises).⁴⁵ But already in the 16th century, Jewish attitudes toward the literary vernacular began to shift. We see evidence of this change in Solomon ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah* (Turkey, 1550).⁴⁶

Shevet Yehudah ('The Rod of Judah') is, among other things, an account of the persecutions of European and Iberian Jews throughout the Middle Ages, and of the disastrous effects of the pogroms of 1391 and the 1492 expulsion. Ibn Verga was born in Seville, converted in 1492, lived in Portugal until the 1506 massacre of *conversos*, when he fled to Naples, and after living through a couple more expulsions from and reconciliations to that city, he returned to Judaism, settling in Turkey, where he finally

⁴⁴ On the relationships between Vidal's work and the Romance literature of his time, see Wacks, "Vidal Benveniste's *Efer ve-Dina*" (Forthcoming).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Boer, Brown and den Boer, Silveira, Barrios (2002 and 2005).

⁴⁶ See the Hebrew edition of Shohet (Ibn Verga 1946), and the Castilian translations of Cantera Burgos (1927) and Cano (Ibn Verga 1990).

published *Shevet Yehudah* in 1550 (Ibn Verga 1990, 9-11).

Critics of Ibn Verga's work have tended to keep in line with traditional readings of Jewish historiography, in which the Jewish relationship to sovereignty is understood as an essentially paternalistic relationship, one backgrounded against the traditional Christian and Jewish doctrines and cosmologies. And while on the surface the content of Ibn Verga's work might seem to hew to this model, his narrative and linguistic strategies speak to a literary consciousness more reflective of modern ideas of Spanish national identity. In Judaic studies, traditional approaches to *Shevet Yehuda* have centered on the relationship between the Jews and the Christian kings portrayed in the book (Yerushalmi 1970), and on situating Ibn Verga's work in the context of other early modern works of Hebrew historiography, such as Yosef Hakohen's *Emeq ha-Bakha* ('Vale of Tears') and Eliyahu Capsali's *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* ('The Minor Tractate of Elijah'), both of which focus on historical persecutions of Jews and contain substantial sections dedicated to the expulsion from Spain.⁴⁷

Where Spanish chroniclers legitimate imperial authority in Roman precedent,⁴⁸ Ibn Verga breaks with the prophetic historical vision and roots the Sephardic experience of diaspora in the Judeo-Roman discourse, frequently citing the Hebrew translation of Josephus (*Sefer Yosippon*). Eleazar Gutwirth writes that "more than any other mediaeval dialogue or polemic, the dialogue found in the *Shevet Yehudah* is an attempt to mimic in Hebrew a Spanish Christian mentality and its image of the Jew" (Gutwirth 1988, 148). Ibn Verga seems to be consciously linking his text with the literary prestige associated with Peninsular Humanism's engagement with classical antiquity. This tendency takes an interesting turn in his use of the Castilian vernacular within the Hebrew text. Just as Castilian (and Catalan) Humanists were in the process of reinvigorating their vernacular writing with latinate linguistic features,⁴⁹ Ibn Verga

⁴⁷ See Yerushalmi (1982, 57-75) and Gutwirth (1988) on the role of the expulsion from Spain and the Sephardim in the development of Jewish historiography in Early Modernity. On Yosef Ha-kohen, see the Hebrew edition of Almladh (Ha-kohen 1981) and the Castilian translation of León Tello (Ha-kohen 1989). On Capsali, see the Hebrew edition of Shmuelevitz et al. (Capsali 1975), and the Castilian partial translation of Moreno Koch (Capsali 2005).

⁴⁸ "Es en el contexto de la historia imperial romana en el que se ven las actividades de Fernando e Isabel el primer ejemplo que salta a la mente está tomado del *Paralipomenon* de Juan Margarit, con su dedicatoria preliminar a los Reyes Católicos y las referencias a la unión de la Hispania ceterior y ulterior, los discursos de Julio César a las cizañeras tribus ibéricas y la política de Augusto César con la que se cierra el libro. La Pax Augusta viene a ser, por así decir, la Pax Hispanica" (Tate 292).

⁴⁹ Gutwirth steers the discussion away from Latin and toward latinate Castilian: "Reminiscences of classical rhetoric in the *Shevet Yehudah* need not be attributed to direct contact with Latin rhetorical manuals or prose works. On the other hand, one of the more widely attested tendencies of fifteenth-century Castilian prose is to attempt to create a latinate romance prose, a literary enterprise in which *conversos* were particularly prominent. Alonso de Cartagena, Juan de Lucena, Hernando del Pulgar are some of the protagonists of the Latinization of Castilian which has at times been thought rather extreme" (1988, 149). On the latinization of Castilian, see Lida de Malkiel's comments on the style (159-230) and lexicon (251-57) of Juan de Mena. Rafael Lapesa likewise points out the effort of 15th century Castilian Humanists to "transplantar al romance usos sintácticos latinos" (267) learned from

seems to be doing something conversely similar by deploying Castilian loan words, thus transferring some of the prestige of his native vernacular to his Hebrew text. María José Cano, the Spanish translator of Shevet Yehudah, points out Ibn Verga's frequent use of Castilian loan words, but misses the opportunity to open the discussion to questions of language choice and the role of language in diasporic identity formation that even a brief foray into the vast literature on diaspora theory brings into focus (Clifford; Hall; Safran; Mishra; Fludernik). Thus Ibn Verga's use of scattered Castilian words can become a linguistic metaphor for geographic and cultural diaspora, by which Castilian is recast as a marker of the prestige of Sephardic culture in the wider context of diaspora.

Conclusion

In this essay I have explained how the institutional cultures of Hispanism and Hebraism have contributed to a substantial lacuna in the study of the Hebrew literature of Christian Iberia, namely the recognition and systematic examination of the relationship between Hebrew literary practice and vernacular Romance culture. I have also begun to address this lacuna by constructing a narrative of the vernacular roots and context of a series of Hebrew writers working in Christian Iberia. An example: the absence of the Hebrew troubadour Todros Abulafia from every major study of Alfonsine literary history (to borrow a phrase from Sáenz-Badillos) "ha perdido su razón de ser." It is time to begin the work of studying these authors and their texts 'en su salsa,' in the context of the languages they spoke and the vernacular culture in which they moved.

Just as modern scholars are ambivalent about the role of Hebrew literature in Spanish literary history (or vice-versa), so medieval Jewish writers were ambivalent about the literary vernacular of their times. They denigrated Romance writings even while borrowing heavily from the practices of Romance writers. Long before Romance became a widely practiced literary vernacular, Ibn Gabirol and his peers inveighed against Romance as a literary language even as they closed their Hebrew poems with Hispano-Romance couplets (*jarchas*). When Castilian, Galician-Portuguese, and Catalan began to gain traction as languages of state and of 'high' culture, Hebrew writers continued to inveigh against their literary vernacular while simultaneously borrowing thematic material (Ibn Zabara, Ibn Sahula, Benvenist). Even a major Hebrew poet such as Todros Abulafia, who enjoyed the patronage of Alfonso X, scarcely appears in the scholarship on Alfonsine literature. Yet Abulafia is routinely described by Hebraists as a 'troubadour' whose poetry combines styles, motifs, and genres from both Hebrew and Romance poetic traditions.

This history of ambivalence continues, and perhaps reaches its peak, with Shem Tov de Carrión, who lambastes the literary vernacular even while writing in Castilian.

newly circulating manuals of rhetoric both classical and medieval (269), their contribution to Castilian of a large number lexical latinisms (270).

His *Proverbios morales*, despite its veiled critique of the literary vernacular, goes on to become a classic of Spanish literature. In the next generation, Vidal Benvenist's cautionary tale warns against assimilationism and materialism using the motifs and set pieces of the Romance literature of his times, with no apparent irony. The vernacularity of these Peninsular Hebrew writers should not surprise us. Anyone even passing familiar with diasporic culture is able to understand that one's identity is not fully compartmentalized according to the literary language they use at one moment or another. A Chicano writer who writes in Spanish hardly checks her 'Americanness' at the door when doing so, nor does the Czech writing in German write as a Berliner. Even though Hebrew is a classical, sacred language, our writers used it in texts that drew heavily on secular genres and themes, and there was no way for them to hermetically de-Hispanize their material in porting it into Hebrew prose or poetry. In re-diaspora after 1492, their identification with Hispano-Romance only intensified, as it became not just an indicator of regional identity but also of religious affiliation, even when they wrote in Hebrew.

This question of the interrelationships between Hebrew and Romance in and around the Iberian Peninsula does not end with Ibn Verga, though I have only hinted at authors beyond the sixteenth century. Hebrew and Hispano-Romance (mostly Castilian and Portuguese) continue to coexist as literary languages in the Sephardic Diaspora, and their intermingling in literary expression (particularly in Israel, where Judeo-Spanish is re-introduced to Modern Hebrew) continues up to the present day. In this essay I have tried to articulate the first chapters of this story, but there are many more to be written.

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