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Arie Schippers

Biblical and Koranic Quotations in Hebrew and Arabic Andalusian Poetry *

In this article I deal with the relation between Holy Writ and poetry in Arabic and Hebrew Andalusian literature. In the first part I discuss general aspects of the Arabs and the Jews and their attitude to their poetic language, and their role as poets in society. In the second part I focus on the theory of Koranic and Biblical quotations in medieval thought.

The first issue is the opposition between Arabic and Jewish languages, although Jews formed part of Arabic culture and Arabic culture was also their own culture. However, as Jews they also wrote Hebrew poetry in which they composed in the language of the Holy Bible. Arabic was the language of their culture, Hebrew the language of their religious tradition. Arabic in principle encompasses a larger domain than just the Holy Writ and religion. For instance, *Allah*, the Arabic word for God, was used equally by pagans, Christians, Jews, and Muslims. This imparted to it more possible connotations than the Hebrew *Elohim*. Medieval Arabs often used the word *Allah* in a jocund sense, which would be unthinkable for present-day Muslims. The latter occasionally forbid the use of *Allah* for God in Arabic Bible translations, as a recent case in Malaysia shows. However, medieval Muslims played around with the language and also with the word *Allah*. For instance, they said – as a parody on the expression *Allahu a'lam* (God knows best) – ‘*Istu-hu 'l-bā'in a'lam*’ (his separated buttocks have a fissure).¹

In Hebrew, the word for God was treated with more reverence than it was in Arabic. Joseph Ibn Zabāra in his *Sefer Sha'ashu'im*,² reworks an

* Conference held at the EAJIS/ECUTJC Summer Colloquium on Medieval Hebrew Poetry, Oxford, Yarnton, 24-27 July 2000.

¹ Abu Sa'd Maṅṅūr Ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ābi, *Nathr al-Durr*, Cairo, 1989, VI, i, p. 157: *istu-hu 'l-bayin a'lam*; VI, ii, pp. 551-558.

² Joseph Ibn Zabara, *Sepher Sha'ashu'im*, ed. by Israel Davidson, New York 1914.

Arabic poem quoted in Ibn Buṭlān's *Physician's Dinner*³ literally, but translates the name of God as *Time (Zeman)*. This is an Arabic notion, denoting Fate and it sounds less august than God's name; the change was because the Jews apparently deemed the verse in question too offensive and silly to be put in the mouth of the Highest. The lines 'God said to him: Be a doctor, then you kill people by taking their wealth. You will take the money of the ill person,' etc.,⁴ is translated 'Time said to the fool: be a physician, then you kill people in exchange for their wealth [...]'⁵

I shall deal first with the difference between Arabic and Hebrew as poetic language, and then with the secular poetic themes in relation to religion. The tradition of Arabic poetic language differs from that of Hebrew; the former was based on a long tradition of poetry from pre-Islamic times.⁶ The poetic language is also used for prose genres, and was codified as a formal language by Arab grammarians. We find literary Arabic in the Koran as well. Compared with the huge volume of pre-Islamic and Islamic poetry, the Koran is only a very small text, in which only one fifth of the root combinations that occur in the poetic Arabic language are used. Thus the corpus of Arabic poetry rivalled the Koran because of the great pre-Islamic lexical ocean from which poetry could emerge. The many lexical items one could learn as a poet going through a desert and sojourning with the Bedouins learning the poetic language should not be overlooked.

As for the Hebrew poetic language, scholars such as Moses Ibn Ezra (1065-1138) in his famous *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍarah wa-al-Mudhākara* [*The Book of Discussion and Memorisation*] were conscious of the linguistic possibilities and impossibilities of Hebrew. They knew about the great loss this language must have suffered in the past, especially when Biblical

³ Ibn Buṭlān, *The Physician's Dinner Party*, ed. by F. Klein-Franke, Wiesbaden 1985.

⁴ Ibn Buṭlān, op. cit., p. 52: *Qāla-l-Lahu: kūn ṭabībān, taqḍī 'alā-'l-nāsi bi-l- dhahābi / ta' kudh māla 'l-marīdi 'afwan thumma tawallā ilā-l-turābi.*

⁵ Ibn Zabara, op.cit., p. 123: *Amar Zeman li-khsil: heyeh rofeh/ tamit bene Adam be-'ad honam// yitron le-kha 'al mal'akhe mawet / ki-hem yemitun he-enosh ḥinnam.*

⁶ The poetic language is an artificial Semitic language of the synthetic type, with archaic features and case endings. It was not spoken in daily life as a mother tongue, in contrast to the vernacular languages of the tribes, which are of the new type of Semitic language, without case endings.

Hebrew was compared with Classical Arabic. According to Ibn Ezra,⁷ 'Because of the long duration of exile and its continuation, the Hebrew language nearly disappeared. [...] Thus all that remains of the Hebrew language are twenty-four books containing only the essential elements of the language'. This remark refers to Hebrew as a literary language, since Ibn Ezra was aware that Hebrew had not been spoken for centuries (since the second century CE). Biblical Hebrew, like Classical and pre-Islamic poetic Arabic, is not a spoken language, but a homogenised literary language.

When speaking about the disappearance and the remains of the Hebrew language, Ibn Ezra was undoubtedly alluding to the number of Semitic roots or trilateral and quadrilateral combinations, which were rediscovered in Muslim Spain by the grammarians of Hebrew, who in their analysis closely followed the work of Arabic grammarians. In the words of Ibn Ezra, God had revealed the secrets of the language to the Hebrew Andalusian grammarians. The richness of the Hebrew language, as Ibn Ezra must have thought, is measured not only by the number of words but also by the number of roots. In order to compare the Hebrew linguistic situation with the Arabic one, I collected the following data: the *Lisān al-'Arab* – a medieval dictionary of poetic Arabic⁸ – lists approximately 8,750 roots, most of which are no longer used in present-day Modern Standard Arabic, whereas the Koran has nearly 1,650 roots, and the language of the Hebrew Bible contains around 2,050 Semitic roots.

In principle, the size of a textual corpus does not determine the richness of roots: this richness lies more in the spirit of the literary language. In the case of Arabic, the richness of roots is due to the poetic language of the Bedouins, which emerged from the diversity of desert life. This richness enhanced the prestige of the poetic language. In Modern Standard Arabic, much of that desert sand has been deliberately removed from the language.

What perhaps also adds to the medieval impression of a lost grandeur of Hebrew is the fact that there are many *hapax legomena* in the Bible, rare roots that are explainable only with the help of Classical Arabic, later on

⁷ Moses Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al-Muhādāra wal-Mudhākara*, ed. A.S. Halkin, Jerusalem 1975; ed. Montserrat Abumalham Mas, Madrid 1985 (I), 1986 (II); 28a (Ms. Bodleiana Neubauer no. 1974).

⁸ By Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manzūr (1233-1311).

listed in the Hebrew-Latin dictionaries of the 19th century as *radices inusitatae arabicae* – or ‘rarely used Arabic roots’. The manner in which Ibn Ezra and his contemporaries looked upon Arabic must have been very much determined by Classical Arab grammar.⁹

The relationship of Arabic Poetry with religion is ambiguous, since the origin of the poetry is tribal and contains pre-Islamic religious notions, as well as the notions of Time and Fate.¹⁰ With the advent of Islam, poetry became a rival of the Koranic text; in a recent publication, poetry is called an ‘anti-text’ of the Koran.¹¹ In early Islam the authorities tried to ban poetry because of its often satiric nature. But just like the pre-Islamic notions of Fate and Time, poetry could not be eradicated from society, and the authorities had to reconcile themselves with the fact poetry was a popular phenomenon in Islamic society. Although poets wrote of Islamic war expeditions and the superiority of the Islamic belief, poetry itself, and its genres and themes developed independently.¹² Invective poems, wine poems, poems of debauchery, love poems about young boys, all belonged to the themes of poetry that were not very much in line with Islam. In Islamic society the poets were often at opposite pole to the pious theologians. A poet such as al-Ma‘arri (d. 1057) announced that he was against all established religions, and he criticised the existence of such holy places as Mecca and Jerusalem.¹³ The wielders of power in Islamic society, kings, governors, and caliphs, most of the time sided of the poets, who praised their glory and sang of their exploits, their debauchery, their wine tipping

⁹ A major role in comparatism between Arabic and Hebrew was of course played by Sa‘adyah Ga‘on, the predecessor of the Hebrew Andalusian grammarians in the Arab East. See Aharon Dotan, Saadia Gaon: A Master Linguist, in: Judith Targarona and Angel Saenz Badillos, *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the 20th Century*, Leiden 1999, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰ Cf. Werner Caskeel, *Das Schicksal in der altarabischen Qaside*, Leipzig 1926; Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arab Literary Tradition: Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry*, Leiden-New York 1994, index.

¹¹ Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, Ithaca 1993. See Introduction.

¹² S.A. Bonebakker, Religious Prejudice against Poetry in Early Islam, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976), pp. 77-99.

¹³ The Meditations of Ma‘arri, in: R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic poetry*², London-Cambridge 1969, pp. 43-289.

and their sexual excess.¹⁴ On the other hand, the rulers knew that what justified their power was the Islamic religion. So the upper class of Islamic society experienced conflict, but in practice the rulers set their authority above that of Islam: people were punished by imprisonment because of their own views, not necessarily because they had sinned against Islam. Abu-al-‘Atāhiyah was jailed because he refused to continue to compose poetry, while his cellmate was a follower of an Islamic sect considered politically unacceptable and a threat to the power of the caliph¹⁵.

However, in certain aspects the Koran, the most important monument of Islam, is comparable to poetry because of its stylistic features and its rhymed prose. Therefore it is not surprising that in their verses the poets quoted passages from the Koran. When *badī‘* (conscious accumulation of stylistic figures) appeared in poetry at the end of the 9th century CE, the proponents of the movement invited such poets as Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (861-908) to engage in theoretical reflection. These poets came up with examples of *badī‘* not only from contemporary and early Arabic poetry but also from the Koran. A special genre was devoted to the inimitability of the Koran as compared with poetry. But did the Arabs really believe that the Koran was superior? Probably not, since more genuine interest is devoted to the poetic material in those treatises than to the Koranic passages. They either deluded themselves on purpose, or they were not sincere in saying that the Koran was superior. What, then, was the value of a Koranic allusion? A Koranic quotation had at least the advantage of being immediately recognisable as something that appertained to a different corpus than that of poetry, and therefore had a certain effect as something derived from another kind of discourse, an anti-text within a text. When a Koranic passage is inserted, additional solemnity, or, in the case of obscenities, humour, had been conveyed.¹⁶

¹⁴ See for instance the many anecdotes on Abu Nuwas (768-816): Ewald Wagner, *Abu Nuwas: eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der fruehen Abbasidenzeit*, Wiesbaden 1965.

¹⁵ Abū-al-Muhassin al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj ba‘da al-Shidda*, ed. Abboud al-Chalil, 5 vols., Cairo 1985. See Index.

¹⁶ Geert van Gelder deals amply with this topic in a forthcoming essay entitled ‘Forbidden firebrands: Frivolous *iqtibās* (quotation from the Qur‘ān) according to medieval Arab critics’.

Even in treatises dealing with the stylistic superiority of the Koran over Arabic poetry, such authors as the Māliki jurist and theologian al-Baḳillāni (d. 1013) also showed much genuine interest in poetry; but he was a devout person, who in the end opted for the Koran and against poetry.¹⁷ The books about the superiority of the Koran only deal with stylistic figures: they do not take into account the contents of the Holy Book. Moses Ibn Ezra has perhaps a similar attitude later on in his own poetics, because in the chapter on *badī'* of the *Muḥāḍarah* he seems to be mainly interested in the stylistics of the Bible, and not so much the content.

As regards the relation between profane poetry and religion in Hebrew Andalusian poetry, the latter was a newly invented poetry in which themes and motifs from Arabic were used as they had developed up to the 10th or 11th century. There is a gap of more than a thousand years between the early use of literary Biblical Hebrew and its later reconstruction by Hebrew Andalusian grammarians and poets. Hebrew poetry was not a threat to the Holy Writ, as Arabic poetry was in the case of the Koran. The Bible is the Hebrew dictionary and no such exists contrast between Hebrew poetry and the Bible as it does between Arabic poetry and the Koran. A Koranic allusion in Arabic poetry is easy distinguishable, but a biblical phrase in Hebrew poetry has no such effect because the Bible is inherent to the language of the poetry itself. So one can assume that the attitude of the religious Jews to profane poetry was not so problematic because its language was totally derived from the Holy Writ.

However, the Hebrew poets used profane motifs and themes, and spoke about sinful love in their poems. The fact that Hebrew Andalusian poets wrote profane poems and at the same time were pious rabbis differentiates their role from that of their Arab colleagues. These were often mundane figures, drinking wine and womanising at court, and also making love to boys, even though Islam condemned all these activities. In Hebrew poetry too situations are described that defy religious morals, such as the pederastic *muwashshahāt* by Ibn Ezra and the poems about being in love with

¹⁷ Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *A Tenth-Century Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: The Sections on Poetry of al-Baḳillāni's Ijāz al-Qur'ān transl. and annotated*, Chicago 1950.

boys by Samuel Ha-Nagid. The Hebrew poets had to combine in one person the two roles, that of the libertine poet and that of the rabbi and pious leader, so they faced an inner struggle. Ibn Ezra, having reached an advanced age, repents for the strophic poems in which he describes his trysts with beautiful young men and rejects them as juvenile sins. And in the preface to Samuel Ha-Nagid's *Dīwān* his son Yehosef tries to give to his father's love poems another, more symbolic meaning.¹⁸

The Arabic and Hebrew poets differ not only in the contrasting situations of their poetic languages, which result in the different relationship between their poetry and their Holy Writ, but also in their complicated social role. The Hebrew poet had to combine the two roles of a mundane poet and a religious scholar in one person.¹⁹

Several Arabic and Hebrew theorists have dealt with the phenomenon of quotations from the Holy Writ. In his famous work on the Hebrew Poetics,²⁰ David Yellin (1864-1941) bases his definition of 'quotation from the Holy Writ' or 'setting a precious stone' [*shibbuz*] on the most prestigious Arabic sources among Arab literati. These sources clarify that not every quotation from the Holy Writ was acceptable for citation. *Al-Mathal al-sā'ir* by Ibn al-Athīr (1163-1239) counts it among an author's benefits 'that he inserts amidst his words parts of verses in suitable places which undoubtedly gives them prestige and splendour'.²¹ But Ibn Hījja (d. 1434)²²

¹⁸ Samuel Ha-Nagid, *Dīwān*, ed. Dov Yarden, Jerusalem 1966, Arabic preface; Ibn Ezra, *Muhādarah* 57a. Are these declarations to be taken for granted at face value? To what extent are these confessions topoi, comparable to Petrarch's complaints about juvenile sins. In medieval times it was perhaps possible to combine several poetic personae, being the result of an internal struggle as described by Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain*, Baltimore 1991.

¹⁹ It is still uncertain whether Hebrew poets, and Arab poets who combined religious science and poetry in one person, for example, the Qayruwāni and Andalusian love poet al-Huṣri (1029-1095), who also produced a long didactic poem on Koranic readings, really suffered an internal struggle. They may have been accustomed to combining different roles and different personae.

²⁰ David Yellin, *Torat ha-Shirah ha-Sefardit*², Jerusalem 1972, pp. 118-149

²¹ *Diwān*-al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Mathal al-sā'ir*, ed. al-Hūfi & Tabāna, Cairo 1962, vol. III, p. 200.

²² Abu Bakr Ibn 'Ali Ibn Hījja al-Hāmawi, *Khizānat al-adab wa-ghayāt al-arab*, Cairo 1291 [1874], p. 539.

in his chapter on *iqtibās* [taking a fire] in the *Khizānat al-Adab* divides this figure of speech into three parts, according to its acceptability or otherwise. Furthermore, *iqtibās* can be divided in two ways: whether the passage borrowed has the same meaning as in the Koran, or whether it goes beyond its original meaning. Moreover, the *Nafahāt* by al-Nabulusi (d. 1731)²³ explains in his chapter on *iqtibās* that this figure of speech occurs when the speaker introduces into his poetry or prose a word from the Koran or from a *ḥadīth* (a tradition of Muhammad) without recognisable change, so that his listeners do not feel that it has been taken from those books.

Mehren,²⁴ who has many quotations, which occur in Ibn Hija's *Khizāna* as well, translates *iqtibās* as 'drawing from a light or fire' (Koran, sura 57, verse 13). He quotes examples from the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīri (1054-1121), principally some prose texts but among them two lines of poetry:

If you had decided to leave us without any injury, *patience is beautiful*
And when you decide to substitute us by others, *God is enough for us and He*
is a wonderful trustee.

Al-Ḥarīri method consists of ending two consecutive poetic lines with Koranic quotes, in this case from sura 12, verses 18 and 83, and sura 3, verse 167, respectively. Mehren gives many other examples of this kind of quotation, and ends the passage with a personal comment: 'Finally we observe that several Muslim orthodox sects consider these allusions in profane texts as a devaluation of the Koran and therefore unacceptable.'²⁵

The greatest authority on the adaptation of Arabic poetics to Hebrew poetics is Ibn Ezra (1065-1138) in his already mentioned *Kitāb al-Muḥādarah wa-'l-Mudhakarrah*. After the last section (no. 20) on the figures of speech, in the eighth and last chapter of this work, Ibn Ezra speaks about quotations from the Bible and the Koran, in respect of the latter, however, without using the term *iqtibās*.²⁶

[154b] 'The Arab poets found it laudable to introduce verses from their Koran what they call *āyāt* or 'wonders' in their poetry, and in their eyes these belong to their glorious sayings. And most of what they introduced in their

²³ 'Abd al Ghani al-Nabulusi, *Nafahāt al-Azhār*, Cairo 1299 [1882], p. 355.

²⁴ Mehren, op.cit, p. 136.

²⁵ Mehren, ibid.

²⁶ References according to Ms. Bodleiana, Neubauer, no. 1974.

hemistichs and metres, goes according to what one of them [namely Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Muqānā (d. 1068), the famous poet from Qabdhāq near Sintra and Lisbon] said.’

He said: ‘He wrote with musk on his doors: go in to them in safety and security [sura 15: 46]’.²⁷

In this line, quoted by Ibn Ezra from the famous *nūniyya*, which was recited to the Hammudite prince Idris Ibn Yahyā al-Mu‘talī (dethroned 1046), the Koran is used outside its original context.

In the next text by Ibn Ezra²⁸ we see a totally different approach. He tries to find Arabic metre in the Koran, and then even in Biblical texts, just like classicists who try to find the famous hexameter in Julius Caesar’s *De Bello Gallico*. He says:

And we found even a metrical verse in their Koran, namely:

‘They will not get piety before they have not spent everything what they were fond of.’

This Koranic verse, which in Arabic is read as ‘*lan tanālū ‘l-birra hattā tunfiqū mim mā tuhibbūn* (sura 3: 91), apparently has to be scanned as a *ramal* dimetre (-v--/-v--/-v--/-v--/).²⁹ Then Ibn Ezra continues:

The poets of our religion have sometimes been capable of a similar procedure in whole verses, or parts of them, which they introduced in hemistichs of verses of various metres with a slight addition or suppression or without either of the two. Most of them we find in the *rajaz* poems of Psalms, Job and Proverbs.

Now Ibn Ezra gives examples of verses according to the Arabic metre in the Bible.³⁰ His example from Prov. 21:13 can be read as a sequence of

²⁷ On the basis of Abu Sa‘d Mansūr Ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ābi, *Nathr al-Durr*, van Gelder (above, note 17) quotes the same Koranic passage, speaking about dildos on which was written: ‘Bring them in with safety and security’.

²⁸ Ibn Ezra gives no examples of Biblical quotations, for obvious reasons: Hebrew poetry is entirely composed in Biblical language; and according to another passage in his *Muḥāḍara* no verse from the Bible has prevalence above another one (141b).

²⁹ There are not many places with this kind of unintended Koranic metrical prose in Arabic theoretical works. However, Geert Jan van Gelder, in a letter to me of 16 May 2000, indicated among others the following sources with Koranic examples: Ibn Ḥijja, *Khizānat al-adab*, pp. 236-238; Al-Suyūṭi, *al-Itqān*, Cairo 1975, vol. III, pp. 296-297 (Koranic examples for all 15 metres).

³⁰ For another account of these problems, cf. Yosef Yahalom, *Reshit ha-Sheqilah ha-*

two times eight long syllables, if we do not count the *shewas* or long ones:

1. *Otem ozno mi-za [a]qat dal / gam hu yiqra [we]-lo ye 'aneh*
Who so stops his ears at the cry of the poor / he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

Perhaps the phrase 'with elision of the letter *waw*' further on in the text applies to the above verse. Other examples of this are evident, among other places, in Prov. 21:22 with an addition of *lo* and in Psalm 69:13 with addition of *kol*:

2. *'Ir gibborim 'alah hakham / wa-yored lo 'oz mivtehad*
A wise man scales the city of the mighty / and casts down the strength of the confidence thereof.
3. *Yasihu bi yoshve sha 'ar / u-nginot kol shote shekhar*
They who sit in the gate speak against me / and I was the song of the drunkards.

Ibn Ezra adds a verse in 'short metre' in which one *shewa* should not be read (Prov. 18: 23 with an addition of a *ya*):

4. *We-tah[a]nanim yedabber rash / we-'ashir ya 'neh 'azzot*
The poor use entreaties / but the rich answer roughly.³¹

In a further passage he shifts to themes, first giving an Arabic example from the Koran:

And the Arab poets have wonderful examples in verses with themes ta-ken from their Koran, which can only taken in such a manner from it as the themes you can see in the following verse about meagreness by one of them:

Wa-law anna mā bi min nuḥūlin murakkabun / 'alā jamalin, ma kāna fī al-nāri khālidu

If the meagreness which is in me (because of my love passion) would have been built / in a camel, no sinner would enter the Fire (of Hell) in eternity.³²

Because in their Koran is said [surah 7:40]:

lā yadkḥulūna al-jannata ḥattā yalija / al-jamalu fī sammi-al-khiyāṭi

Meduyyeqet ba-Shira ha-'Ivrit, *Leshonenu* 47 (1983), pp. 25-61.

³¹ This metre must be *marnin*, the Hebrew variant of the Arabic metre *hazaj*.

³² A similar line is to be found in Ibn Hijja's *Khizānat al-Adab*, which goes as follows: *wa-law anna ma bi min jawan wa-sabābatin / 'alā jamalin lam yabqā fī al-nār kāfiru*.

They will not enter paradise, unless / a camel goes through the *samm* of a *khiyāt*, i.e., the eye of a needle.

And this poet says:

If the meagreness of his body would be in a camel, it had become so meagre that it entered the eye of a needle so that no person would stay in the fire eternally [*law anna nuḥūla jirmi-hi yakūnu bi-jamalin la-naḥala ḥatta yadkhula 'ayna 'l-ibrati fa-lam yaqba fi 'l-nāri, sālimun mukhlidun*].

Next Ibn Ezra gives examples from his contemporaries, who wrote in Hebrew:

Among our companions, there are who used this device and they disposed in their verses of themes which can be explained in the Holy Writings. To these belong those who reach their goal in one verse and there are those who only reach their goal in two verses. Shemuel Ha-Nagid said in his long letter to rabbi Yosef, may God have compassion on his soul:

You were plagues for our hearts, as plagues of someone whose highness is deep // Our letters we made them two living birds; that was on the day of his purification (50,27-28).

Another poet has said [Ibn Ezra]:

If I would speak to the Rock, then it would give water.³³

[Abu 'Umar] Ibn Sahl has said:

The dew of his favour is upon the earth, but my soul is dry as the fleece of Yeruba'al.

All these cases mentioned by Ibn Ezra are references to prescriptions of offerings or stories in the Bible. They are quoted as references to the contents of the Bible rather than the borrowing of sentences and phrases. From the Bible he took the motif of Moses striking the rock so that water came out, and that of the fleece of Gideon in Judges 6:36-40.

From this passage in the *Muḥāḍarah*, I draw the following conclusions. Without using a specific term like *iqtibās*, Ibn Ezra distinguishes three ways of poetically using a Holy text:

a. Concerning the quotation of textual wording, he gives only Arabic ex-

³³ This kind of conceptual borrowing with puns on the biblical Moses is found a lot in the Arabic Andalusian poet from Seville Ibrāhīm Ibn Sahl (1212-1251).

amples of poetry with borrowings from the Koran; he does not present any Hebrew examples, probably because all the wording of Hebrew poetry comes from the Bible.

- b. He scans parts of the Holy Writ according to Arabic metre: he comes up with one example from the Koran and several from the Bible. In some Arab stylistic treatises this is called *insijām*, 'order' or 'harmony', but Ibn Ezra does not use this term.
- c. With regard to quotations of motifs and themes from the Koran and the Bible in poetry, he cites an Arabic line, which uses the concept of the camel going through the eye of a needle, taken from the Koran. With Hebrew poetry he takes lines with the concept of Moses striking the rock and that of the fleece of Gideon and others from the Bible.

The difference between quotations from the Koran and from the Bible is clear in Ibn Ezra's treatment: he does not give textual quotations from the Bible but he does from the Koran. He also deals with thematic borrowing from the Koran and the Bible; this category exists in both Hebrew and Arabic poetry.

It is useful to know that sometimes the boundary between a thematic and a textual quotation is blurred. This is the case, for instance, with the Arabic poet of Jewish descent Ibn Sahl al-Isrā'īlī (Seville; 1212-1251), who composed a whole series of poems about his beloved boy Mūsā, with thematic allusions as well as textual quotations from the Koran. But this mixture is only germane to Arabic and not to Hebrew poetry since in the latter, which linguistically is a Biblical mosaic, only thematic allusions from the Bible are relevant as a stylistic feature.

However, in more recent times scholars of Hebrew Andalusian poetry, such as Sha'ul 'Abdallah Yosef and David Yellin, were acquainted with the Arabic notion of *iqtibās* (quotation from the Holy Writ), translated by Yellin as *shibbuz*, and they did not have the same problem as Ibn Ezra. In the nineteenth century Sha'ul Yosef, a Baghdad-born merchant living in Hong Kong (1849-1906), was also interested in the figure of *iqtibās*, which he mentions several times in his Commentary on the Laudatory Poems of Yehuda Halevy (1075-1140), entitled *Giv'at Sha'ul* (Vienna 1923). He notes several direct quotes from the Bible set in the context of Halevy's

secular poems, among them the following:

1. In poem 2:11, which is addressed to R. Aharon Yehuda, Halevy uses the biblical expression 'according to his service and his burden', alluding to the biblical Aharon in Numeri 4:19: 'Aharon and his sons give them each according to his service and his burden'.
2. In poem 95:6 Halevy quotes Song of Songs 4:16: 'Awake north wind and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out'.
3. Speaking about himself and referring to his friend Ibn Ezra, Halevy quotes in poem 37:13 Ecclesiastes 4:8 ['there is one alone, and there is not a second; yea ye had neither child nor brother'] saying:
There is one alone and no second and also he has no son or brother and there is no end for his pains
Bad time gave him gracious confidence on one day and on the second he robbed him.
4. In poem 59:2, Halevy says about Shemu'el Ha-Nagid, quoting Daniel 9:24 and II Samuel 3:8:
It is time to send a redeemer to Jerusalem / my Lord calls Samuel again.

Yellin comes up with some examples from secular poetry, among which two instances are from Solomon Ibn Gabirol's long elegy on Yequti'el (no. 156:54,64), in which the beginning is a clear allusion to scripture:

The mirth of tabrets [=drums] ceased, and gladness is taken away on the day his feet were tied and the day they were chained (Isaiah 24:8; 16:10).

There the vultures gathered and there all the birds of wing made their nests and there they hatched (Isaiah 34:15).

Especially verse 64 is modified to a great extent, because the biblical text reads: 'There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay and hatch, and gather under her shadow there shall the vultures also be gathered, everyone with her mate'.

Resuming the situation of Hebrew poetry and its links with the Bible, one can best sum up the situation in the words of Yellin:³⁴

The use of parts of verses of the Hebrew Bible and especially from the stylis-

³⁴ Yellin, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

tic works and the poetry therein, is very extensive in the words of literati and poets from the whole period of the Middle Ages and afterwards, nearly until our days. Because it conveyed and added grace and splendour to their words. It aroused in the heart of the listener a pleasant feeling since he suddenly recognised words, which he'd known for long at a time when he found himself surrounded by something totally different.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century theorists, such as Sha'ul Yosef and Yellin, give examples of quotations of literal wordings, contrary to Ibn Ezra. They were less aware that the whole corpus of the poetry of the Hebrew Andalusian school consists by definition of the holy language. Some authors, for instance, the early nineteenth-century Leopold Dukes and the late twentieth-century Dan Pagis, were more conscious of this. Hebrew poems are mosaics of pieces from the Hebrew Bible. Dukes mentions several heroes of profane literature, including al-Harīzi and Immanuel da Roma.³⁵ He also mentions some later scholars and their opinions about *musiv* (mosaic) style, such as Moses Ibn Habīb (1450-1520), Joseph del Medigo (1591-1655), and Samuel Archivolti (1515-1611).

The problem remains why a certain phrase of Hebrew poetry rather than others should be considered a quotation; all are of Biblical origin. Everything about this poetry is Biblical, so no striking feature, no additional effect, can be singled out³⁶ such as, in Arabic poetry, the occurrence of a Koranic phrase. Amidst pagan poetic motifs the latter sometimes conveys to the context a solemn meaning, and sometimes one that is obscene and hilarious.

³⁵ Leopold Dukes, *Kenntnis der neuhebraeischen religioesen Poesie*, Frankfurt am Main 1842, pp. 131, 134-135.

³⁶ In this connection, it is interesting to learn perhaps that Ibn Ezra himself in the passage about First Lines expressly ruled against any passage from the Holy Writ being considered more important than any other. See *Muhādarah* 141b.