¿The Hebrew maqama¿, (Chapter 8.1-8.1.8.3)

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Thus, our provisional answer has to be negative. Maqamas probably did not influence the birth of the modern novel through the picaresque novel. Yet the question is rather tangled and one may not pass it over in silence. When we know more about the Arabic oral tradition in Spain and the Hebrew contributions - note that, e.g., Fernando de Rojas, the author of Celestina, was a convert - we may have to reconsider the question and later scholars should be able to show that, after all, maqamas did have an influence on the picaresque tradition in Europe.

8.1. The Hebrew maqama
(by Dr. Arie Schippers)

As with Andalusian maqamas in general, Hebrew (Andalusian) maqamas did not follow too closely the model set by al-Hamadhānī and al-Hārīrī. In Hebrew literature, other stories and narrative pieces in rhymed prose began to be called maqamas even though they did not follow the scheme of the Arabic classical maqama of al-Hamadhānī and al-Hārīrī. Shelomoh ibn Saqbel, who lived in Muslim Spain during the first half of the 12th century, wrote the first known Hebrew maqama. Later authors of Hebrew works in this genre include Yosef ben Simeon Zabara and Yehudah ibn Shabbetai. However, the greatest writer of the Hebrew maqama - Yehudah al-Harizi, who composed Hebrew as well as Arabic maqamas - returned to the Classical Arabic scheme of al-Hamadhānī and al-Hārīrī. The general problem with defining the maqama, which in the case of Arabic could often be limited only to the fictitious, often picaresque story with the narrator-protagonist model, is that it would exclude many rhymed prose texts which in Hebrew literature would be called maqamas. In Hebrew literature, narrative rhymed prose texts interspersed with poems are generally called maqamas. Thus also animal fables in a collection of rhymed prose narratives may be called maqamas.

In Arabic literature, there is also a narrative belletristic literature in plain style - not only fables, but also anecdotes, love stories and adab literature of every kind. In Hebrew narrative literature, however, there was no plain style: the rediscovered literary Hebrew language, which was derived from the Hebrew Bible according to the methods of the Arab grammarians, dates from the 10th century and is an artificial literary language which not only is not spoken (spoken Hebrew language died out in the 2nd century), but has no reference to the daily life of those days. To apply the newly discovered rules of the language, Hebrew was used for poetry and rhymed prose in the form of epistles and maqamas. Although the reference frame of these Hebrew genres was Arabic poetry and rhymed prose, the connotations of the Hebrew language were Biblical. There was no connection with daily life; there were few possibilities in Hebrew to express the social reality of daily life (Zinberg 1972: 173-176; Drory 2000: 198 ff.). Thus in a recently edited maqama by Yosef ben Simeon in praise of Maimonides (Yahalom 1997: 543-77), it takes some time before one realises that the Hebrew word menorah does not mean candelabrum (lamp), but refers to the lighthouse or the Pharos of Alexandria (Egypt), very much in conformity with the Arabic mandāra. All the sociological implications of Bedouin hospitality of the Arabic original written by Ibn al-Shahīd [12] - not to be confused with his contemporary Ibn Shuhayd [3] - are absent from al-Harizi’s maqama of the rooster, because the Hebrew language did not have those connotations (Drory 2000: 203-204). The problem of the link between maqama literature and reality was sometimes felt as an identity problem of the author: the narrator is one of the author’s masks. In more than one case (al-Harizi, Ibn Shabbetai), the author intervenes within the fictional surroundings.

When it was necessary for Jews to express realia and scientific or philosophical conceptions, they wrote in Arabic, although after a century and a half they tried to create a new Hebrew technical language for non-belletristic works, in order to familiarise also the non-Arabic readers among them with the Arabic philosophical works of Yehudah ha-Levi, Maimonides and others.

The fact that there are no plain Hebrew belletristic texts at the beginning of the redevelopment of Hebrew literature in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries means that, contrary to the situation in Arabic literature, belletristic prose texts generally are in rhymed prose, including even narrative texts of philosophical origin, about man and cosmos. Some traditional Indian literature from outside the Arabic world, which was transmitted in Arabic plain prose, was transformed into Hebrew maqamas, as all narrative rhymed prose in Hebrew is called. Therefore the definition of maqama within Hebrew literature might be slightly different from that in Arabic literature. Moreover, in the mind of modern Hebrew literary historians such as Schirmann, writers of rhymed prose are called ‘poets’ rather than ‘prosaists.’

In the following we will deal with the six different kinds of maqamas, that is: the picaresque maqama; novellas and stories; stories with debate; the maqama reduced to the debate itself; fables and folklore; and science. This division may be somewhat artificial because there are many overlaps and the work of al-Harizi is so varied that it encompasses everything. However we can not deal with all kinds of maqamas, since everything written in rhymed prose may be considered as such.
Some of the kinds we do not discuss in the following are: the laudatory maqama such as the one composed by Yosef ben Simeon on Maimonides (Yahalom 1997), the descriptive maqama such as the one by an 12/13th century Egyptian author from Alexandria Moshe bar Abraham Dar'i entitled No Amnon u-Misrayim (about the Jewish community of Alexandria and Egypt) published by Israel David-Son (Jerusalem 1926), the didactic maqama composed by the Egyptian Yosef ben Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi about paronomasias entitled Maqamat al-tajnis (about paronomasias; Dishon 2000), the moralistic maqama by Qalonymos ibn Qalonymos entitled Even Bohan ("Touchstone"), and Samuel ben Yosef Ibn Sason's Avne ha-Shoham ("Onyxes"), a religious polemic, Maimon Gallipapa's Medical Aphorisms, Shelomoh Bona'ed's maqama against the notables of Saragossa, and Matityahu's Akhitov we-Salmon about the three religions and his Begidat ha-Zeman ("Treacheries of the World:" see 8.1.7, nos. 17, 19, 20). Other minor authors are Akhitov ben Yishaq (Sicily, second half of the 13th century) who wrote his Mahberot ha-Tene about the thirteen principles of Maimonides, Calev Aphendopolo (Constantinople, 15th century) with his collection Avner ben Ner, and Judah Zarqa's Lekhem Yehudah (Rhodes, 17th century) about love, and Zekharya ad-Dahri's Sefer ha-Musar (Yemen, 16th century; see Dishon 1994).

8.1.1. The picaresque maqama

In the model of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, the story of a single maqama generally consists of two persons, one of whom is the protagonist, a picaresque person who earns his living by the gift of his often treacherous tongue, and who at the end of the episode is recognised by the narrator. Most maqamas have the same protagonists and narrators in each story, but at another location, and have references to historical persons, but the narrator and the protagonist cannot be historical in the sense that they cover more than is possible in a lifetime, while there is no specific development in age or attitude of the two persons from one story to another. However, this basic structure of the maqama story is often modified: for instance, sometimes the protagonist is also the narrator of his own treacherous acts, in addition to the difference in style that can exist between the rhymed prose by al-Hamadhānī and that of al-Ḥarīrī, al-Ḥarīrī's style being more elaborate and his maqamas longer.

Under the title Mahberot Iti'el, Yehudah al-Ḥarīzī translated into Hebrew many maqamas by al-Ḥarīrī [19]; his later work Tahkemoni contains 50 maqamas and comprises also elaborations of Arabic maqamas, such as a translation of al-Hamadhānī's Baghdādhiyya (12), which he adapts to the narrator-protagonist model, whereas al-Hamadhānī only has a narrator-cum-hero. Al-Ḥarīzī also made use of an episode from a long maqama by the Andalusian Arabic author Ibn al-Shahīd, creating a similar episode about the intended slaughter of a rooster in Hebrew in his Tahkemoni (no. 10). Al-Ḥarīzī wanted to prove that it was possible to use Arabic literary forms in Hebrew. Later Hebrew authors of maqamas — such as Immanuel of Rome — were very much under his influence.

8.1.1.1. Yehudah al-Ḥarīzī, Tahkemoni: Mahberot Iti'el

Al-Ḥarīzī was probably born in Toledo. He lived for a while in Provence, then travelled to Egypt, Syria and Iraq, visiting Alexandria, Jerusalem, Damascus, Mosul and Baghdad, before settling as an Arabic poet in Aleppo, where he died in 1225. As said, he translated al-Ḥarīrī's maqamas (or a great number of them) under the title Mahberot Iti'el. This undertaking was not without difficulty, because there are many allusions to Arabic society and culture and individuals in the Arabic maqamas, and above all ingenious plays with the Arabic language for which he had to choose equivalents such as palindromes with 4, 5, 6 or 7 letters or more, or maqamas without certain letters or sounds. Although he probably translated all 50 maqamas, the surviving manuscript contains only 27 of them. The collection was named after the narrator, Iti'el. The other protagonist, the rogue, is called Heber ha-Qeni, which has the Biblical notion of "outsider of society" (see Judges 4: 11, 17; 5: 24). This rogue is maintained as a protagonist in al-Ḥarīzī's Sefer Tahkemoni. While composing this work in the Arab Orient, he indicates in his introductory chapter that he wants to show that the Holy Language can rival Classical Arabic. The 50 stories in his Tahkemoni are, like the maqamas by al-Ḥarīrī, independent stories, although almost all have the same two protagonists. There is no continuity or development between the stories, just as there is no continuity between, for example, Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse stories.

Frequently, the author appears in the story (a kind of Pirandello avant la lettre), thus producing a certain confusion between reality and fiction, leaving in the air the possible identification of the author with his protagonists. We will see this in Ibn Shabbetay, Ibn Zabara and Ibn Sāhula's Meshal ha-Qadmoni. Al-Ḥarīzī used this procedure by presenting himself in the first chapter of the Tahkemoni. In this chapter the narrator of the fiction, Heman the Ezrahite ("The Trustworthy Insider"), tells the reader that the real author of the work spoke to him ("I was told by the author of this book"). The place of action is a meeting of cultivated men, "sons of the Hebrews," in which the author participated. The other persons in the group were intelligent men with mastery over the language and rhetorics. A young Hebrew
detaches himself from the group and makes a great impression because of his rhetorical abilities. He starts praising the maqamas by al-Ḥarūzī, maintaining that no other language is as beautiful as Arabic. The author of the book agrees with the young man about the superiority of Arabic over other languages, except for Hebrew. Then the young man proposes that the author should compose a book of Hebrew maqamas. When this person reveals himself, he is none other than Heber, the protagonist of al-Ḥarūzī’s maqamas. Here we have a direct dialogue between author and protagonist, just as Ibn Shabbetay directs himself to Zerah, his protagonist, in the Minḥet Yehudah. There is a certain identification between the author and his protagonist. To give an idea of the variety of contents of al-Ḥarūzī’s maqamas, here is a passage from Zinberg (1972; 170-171):

(...) the style of the Tahkemoni is also extremely varied. Now the poet is solemn; he gives ethical instruction, preaches about morality (in the second maqama), composes prayers and praises for the glory of the Creator (in the fifteenth maqama). On the ruins of Jerusalem he laments the fate of Zion (Maqama 28 and the song ‘Shalom Le-Ir Shalem’ in the last maqama). At the graves of the prophet Ezekiel and Ezra the Scribe he recites elegies (Maqamas 35 and 50). He reports a religious debate between the pious ‘believer’ and the ‘heretic’ (Maqama 17). He celebrates in enthusiastic songs the great Hebrew poets of Spain (Maqamas 3 and 18). Then suddenly the serious poet vanishes, and in his place appears the waggish prankster and maker of jokes. Laughingly he tells a comical story about a farmer and a rooster (Maqama 10), about the deeds of a charlatan doctor (Maqama 30), about a foolishly arrogant merchant (Maqama 34), about the bizarre behaviour of a fool in love (Maqama 48), and about the pranks of seven beauties (Maqama 20). Alharizi is lavish with clever riddles and silly questions (Maqamas 36 and 44), with lusty anecdotes (Maqama 35), with epigrams and caustic sayings (Maqamas 37 and 48). An extraordinary dialectician, he loves to describe long, heated debates in which each party attempts to demonstrate that there is none greater than he in the world: Day wrangles with Night (Maqama 39), Man with Woman (Maqama 41), Land with Sea (Maqama 43), Generosity with Miserliness (Maqama 42), the Sword with the Pen (Maqama 40).

Among the Hebrew sources of al-Ḥarūzī are Minḥet Sone’ ha-Nashim by Yehudah ibn Shabbetay and Ne’um Asher ben Yehudah by Ibn Saqbel. Maqama 6 by al-Ḥarūzī is very much akin to Yehudah ibn Shabbetay’s maqama (see 8.1.2.2).

8.1.2. Novellas and stories

All kinds of narrations belong to the types of narration found in rhymed prose, also those whose development sticks to one and the same basic argument during the whole story. Some of these stories are bundled in larger collections, as are the picaresque maqamas.

8.1.2.1 Shelomoh ibn Sahl, Ne’um Asher ben Yehudah

The earliest known Hebrew Andalusian maqama is Ne’um Asher ben Yehudah ("The Utterances of AbY") by Shelomoh ibn Sahl (or Shelomoh ibn Saqbel) who lived in the first half of the 12th century. The narrator falls in love with a young girl who saw him from a window and threw to him an apple bearing a love note in the form of a poem. After a sleepless night tormented by his feelings towards the beautiful unknown lady, he returns under her window and spends the whole day waiting there. When night falls, he goes for a walk but faints. The women of the house pick him up and take him to the harem, where he is made the object of fun with the help of masks and disguises. The last and most serious mockery consists of the fact that the women of the harem promise to unveil the woman who wrote the note that was thrown with the apple and who, so they say, is the most beautiful of them. The women leave the lover and the beloved woman alone in "her" room. He says: "You have enamoured me only with your glance. Take off your veil." But when the veil is taken off, he sees a beard and "she" laughs and says: "Stand up and do not be sad: I am your friend the Adulamite. Drink with me." He then discovers that this person is an old friend of his (Navarro Peiro 1988a: 98-99).

Here we have a love story which has much in common with the picaresque maqama in its most pure form of two protagonists, the rogue and the narrator: the two meet without recognising each other, and finally the rogue identifies himself and they enjoy each other’s company. The background to the action is Arabic, with its harem and disguises, and Schirmann (1956, II: 555) is of the opinion that this maqama is based on an undiscovered Arabic original. It seems very probable that there is a connection between the disguises and masks in this maqama and the Arabic shadow plays (see 8.1.2.2 and 9.3). Similar motifs are also used by Yehudah al-Ḥarūzī in his Tahkemoni (no. 31). But the difference of this Hebrew maqama with those of the average Arabic maqama of the Haririan/Hamadhanian type is that in the Hebrew one a love affair is the main subject, the Arabic ones representing a male society with very few love affairs (but cf. also 9.1, 9.4, and 9.5).
Among the novellas is *Minhat Yehudah sone' ha-nasim* ("Gift of Yehudah the Women Hater"). Yehudah ibn Shabbetay, who apparently was born in 1168 and lived in Toledo and Saragossa, composed what at first sight seems to be a misogynous work, because it contains fierce attacks on women and marriage. But in the end he shows himself to be in favour of marriage. He defines his book as one that tells the story of a man whose soul was caught in the trap of a woman, and says he wrote it for his best friends.

In Yehudah ben Yishaq ibn Shabbetay’s *Women Hater* we find a wise man Tahkemoni ("Wise Man") who several times has a dream vision with a divine appearance. This appearance orders him to tell the world that women are the source of all evil. On his deathbed, Tahkemoni asks his son Zerah ("Rising Sun," “Sunrise") to promise to avoid the company of women for the rest of his life. Zerah makes the promise. Then, with three faithful friends, he goes to a foreign but blessed country, where myrrh and oleanders always flourish. There, Zerah spreads the idea that men should avoid women and marriage as they would the devil. The female population of the country is startled and a parliament of women is convened, which deliberates on how to end this situation. A clever old woman named Kozbi ("The Person of the Tricks or Lies") finds a solution to the problem: she manages to make Zerah fall in love with the most beautiful girl in the country, Ayalah ("Young Gazelle," “Fawn;" i.e., beautiful young girl). Zerah becomes caught up in the old woman’s net and proposes to Ayalah. The wedding is described in a humorous manner. The bride—wedding contract and is not aware that under the bride’s canopy there sits another woman, hidden behind veils. She is Rispah bat Ayah ("Red-hot Coal daughter of Hawk"), an ugly, malicious woman.

So. His new wife tells him with satanic laughter that from now on she will be the boss and he will be the servant. Rispah guarantees her husband that she will make life as unbearable as possible for him. Zerah asks his friends for help. The author himself intervenes and says: "My Fate is the same as yours. I have only misfortune in my marriage."

In order to help Zerah, his friends get together and decide that Zerah must divorce Rispah. But the many women of the parliament insist that Rispah remain Zerah’s wife. They decide to take council with the king, and each party produces its arguments. But then, suddenly, the author intervenes, and says in the king’s presence: "I swear to God, who has elevated your throne and who has spread your glory to the heavens, that Tahkemoni has never lived, Zerah never took Rispah bat Ayah as his wife, and that all other characters never existed." They were created by the dream. The imaginative power of the poet created them.

The subject dealt with in this maqama has some similarities with the motifs of an Egyptian Shadow play: In Ibn Dāniyāl’s play Ṭarf al-khayyāl ("Shadow Spirit"), Prince Wīsāl is cheated during the wedding ceremony, and the name of the bride Dabba bint Miftāḥ ("Lock Daughter of Key") is a similar device. Although Ibn Dāniyāl lived in the 13th century and cannot possibly have influenced such an early work as the *Women Hater*, the Arabic genre of shadow play may have existed already and may have influenced the maqamas (see 9.3).

Many years later (late 13th, early 14 century), a well-known Provençal poet – Yedayah ha-Penini from Beziers – read the work by Yehudah ibn Shabbetay and decided to renew the polemic by placing himself at the side of the women in his *Oheb ha-nashim* ("Women Lover").

The Hebrew maqama

The story *Efer we-Dinah* was written around 1400 and edited by a certain Don Vidal ibn Lavi Benveniste (b. ca. 1365). Schirmann (1956, II: 592) considers him one of the most notable poets of the period: he was a son of Benveniste ben Shelomoh ben Meshullam ibn Lavi, a member of the Cavallería family, an important Jewish family of Saragossa. According to Schirmann, in *Efer we-Dinah* the theme of the old man who marries a young woman was introduced into Hebrew Spanish literature.

The story of Efer and Dinah is about an old man, Efer, full of evil, following the longings of his heart. At old age his wife Mehitab’el, a wise and pious woman, daughter of a mighty man, dies from grief because she does not succeed in convincing her husband to leave his evil deeds. After the mourning period has passed, the old man sees a beautiful girl named Dinah and her eyes strike him with love and passion and he goes to her father to ask her in marriage. The father is a poor man and he complies to the wishes of Efer. But Dinah is not very pleased about it. She does not like this old man, but her father compels her to marry Efer. At the end of the story, the author explains that the story is nothing but an allegory. The old Efer symbolises the old man in the world, and his first wife Mehitab’el, who dies before he meets Dinah, represents Wisdom. Dinah is the symbol of men’s lust. Harbona, the servant who has advised Efer to eat a miraculous fish in order to recover his virility, represents the devil or man’s inclination towards evil. The miraculous fish represents passion. According to Schirmann (1956, II: 592), the end is written to
avoid the comment of pious readers who might consider the text obscene (see also Navarro Peiro 1988: 55-57).

8.1.2.4. Ya‘aqov ben El‘azar, Sefer ha-Meshalim

The Hebrew works by Ya‘aqob ben El‘azar contain writings in rhymed prose, among them Sefer ha-meshalim ("Book of Stories"). The first section (the first four chapters) consists of allegories, debates and competitions. Chapter I contains an allegory whose personae are the narrator, the soul and the heart. Chapter II is a discussion about the merits of poetry and prose, chapter III tells the rhetoric deeds of an extempore poet, and chapter IV is a dispute between the sword and the pen. The second section (the remaining six chapters) contains tales of love and adventure, such as the story of the lad Yashefeh and his two beloved women. Ya‘aqov ben El‘azar retains the narrator who appears in the maqamas of other authors. Like al-Ḥarizī, he starts his stories with a formula indicating the narrator (Ne‘um Lemet‘el ben Iti‘el; "Tale of Lemet‘el ben Iti‘el"). In the love stories in the second section, there is also much Arabic influence. Portrayed, for instance, are a slave market, palaces of magic beauty surrounded by splendid gardens, an infatuated lover who behaves like a fool, etc. (Navarro Peiro 1988: 58). There are elements that remind us of the Italian epics by Ariosto and Tasso, which also have female heroes and beautiful gardens. But one should not forget that Arabic folkloristic chivalry stories have female heroes, and in the love stories of the Arabian Nights there are many passive male lovers who are the love objects of female lovers who take the initiative. Likewise, Yashefeh was the love object of his two female lovers Yefiyah and Yemimah, who fought over him in a duel. Schirmann (1956, II: 207) underlined the extreme youth of the lovers (they were virtually children) and compares them with those in the French story Aucassin et Nicolette. The types of beloved and lover have nothing to do with the cruel lady who enjoys tormenting her lovers, which we find elsewhere in Arabic and European literature. On the contrary, in the Meshalim there are several cases of requited love, where the lady is as important and as active as a man, even duelling in order to gain possession of her beloved. The insolent women sometimes win the indolence and passiveness of the men, women having the principal role, as in several stories in the Arabian Nights.

8.1.2.5. Immanuel da Roma, Mahberot

Immanuel b. Solomon of Rome (Manoello Giudeo) was a contemporary of the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1266-1321). His Mahberot Immanuel (Brescia 1492; critical ed., Jerusalem 1957), which contains all his prose and poems, was influenced by the writings of Yehudah al-Ḥarizī, an influence Immanuel admitted. His Maqamas or Mahberot contain stories or poetic contests intermingled with poetry, which plays an eminent role within the context of rhymed prose. Immanuel was one of the first to compose sonnets in Italian and the first to compose Hebrew sonnets, 38 of which he incorporated in his Mahberot. His links with Provençal and Italian literature are evident. His stories are reminiscent of Italian Duecento and Trecento literature, with its ideas about divinely inspired love which we find in Dante’s Vita Nova, and facetious poetry such as Cecco Angiolieri’s, and storytelling as in Boccaccio’s Decameron. In his third maqama the poet apparently is in love with the sister of the ruler, who – although a nun – in the end is seduced by the poems of the poet, and even dies as repentance for her love passion. Immanuel makes an elegiac poem upon her death, just as Dante composed poems upon the death of Beatrice. But Immanuel is more facetious and does not believe in the morality of his time. The sixth maqama is a contest between the poets of Spain and those of Provence. Maqama 14 is about the death of a father who is married to a wicked woman and has a wicked son. When he dies in Greece, people send letters to Rome about the inheritance. But an impostor (Efraim) obtains the property by pretending that he is the son, Daniel. When the real son and his mother discover the deceit, the mother removes her widow’s clothes and stops weeping, “since she did not inherit anything from his wealth.” Thus also the persons who are deceived are portrayed as being wicked and deceitful. Immanuel’s works comprise 28 mahberot, the last being Mahberet ha-Tofet ve-ha-Eden ("Hell and Paradise") in which the influence of Dante’s Divine Comedy is recognisable.

8.1.3. Stories and debates: Yosef ibn Zabara’s Sefer Sha‘ashu‘im

Sefer Sha‘ashu‘im ("Book of Delights") was written in Barcelona at the end of the 12th century by Yosef b. Meir ibn Zabara, whose cultural environment was clearly Muslim. The book contains a fable about a conflict between the strong leopard and the sly fox, which in turn forms the framework for another fable and for four other stories, which describe faithless women (one of whom is the widow of Ephesus, who also appears in Petronius’ Satyricon). One of the stories is a version of the fable of the fox in the vineyard, although it is completely devoid of the homiletic bent of the Midrash. The book has traces of Arabic, Greek and Indian culture, and parallels with collections of Mediaeval exempla literature.
Ibn Zabara’s Book of Delights is one of the funniest story books of the maqama genre. Many types of women appear in this book. Yosef the physician dreams of the appearance of a tall man who awakens him from sleep and offers him a meal. After having eaten – but not without first praying – Yosef asks the stranger his name. The man is Enan han-Natash, and the name contains the letters which form the word shaitan (devil). His profession seems to be the same as Yosef’s and his people and religion seem to be the same. He asks Yosef to leave his country and to travel with him, after discussing medicine and the pros and cons of travelling, illustrated with animal fables, with the story of the leopard and the fox as a framework. Among the fables there are several which warn against taking council with women and about their unfaithfulness, although one of them is pro-women.

They set off on their journey, and Enan asks Yosef in a riddling manner: “Will you bear me or shall I bear you?” referring to telling a story as a way of bearing someone when travelling. In this way the story about a clever young girl is introduced. This story finished, they arrive at a village inn, where they pass the night. The food at the inn is poor and scanty. As physicians they discuss food and its nutritional value. The donkeys that carried them are hungry and pitiful. The two men sleep on the ground without pillows.

The following day, they continue. They pass by a town whose former judge is a friend of Enan. Three judge stories are told. They travel on and reach a town called Tovah, where they meet an old man and tell him that they have been travelling for seven days. The old man invites them to his house and is very hospitable. During the meal the old man tells pleasant stories, after which they go to bed. The food at the inn is poor and scanty. As physicians they discuss food and its nutritional value. The donkeys that carried them are hungry and pitiful. The two men sleep on the ground without pillows.

The following morning a violent discussion breaks out between Yosef and Enan, because Yosef has found his donkey muzzled and without any food. Enan reassures him. Enan shows Yosef his town full of sinners and madmen, all of them giants. When Enan speaks about his love for one of his friend’s daughters, Yosef warns him not to marry a woman from among the stupid peasant population. Enan tells a story about the malicious washerwoman who caused the death and perdition of a whole town. Because he hates the manners of the inhabitants of Enan’s town, Yosef goes back to his hometown, Barcelona, where his munificent patron lives, Rabbi Sheshet ben Benveniste, the pride of the Jewish people.

The medical dispute and the debate on harmful food go back to the Christian physician Ibn Buṭlān (d. 1066; see 5.2). His Physicians’ Dinner Party has perhaps an autobiographical touch, because in Cairo, the Fatimid capital, Ibn Buṭlān had hoped to meet famous physicians, among them Ibn Rīḍwān, and to become a well-known doctor but without success. In their writings Ibn Buṭlān and Ibn Rīḍwān accused each other of ignorance of medicine and philosophy.

8.1.4. Literary debates

As we have seen (7.2.1), in Arabic literature maqama and mundaṭara were often crossbred. Yehudah ibn Shabbetay, the author of Minhat Yehudah, appears to have written two works of this kind with a satirical nature. One of them belongs to the genre of disputes or debates, and is called Milhemet ha-hokmah we-ha-‘osher (“Struggle of Wisdom and Wealth”). Written in 1214 in honour of Todros ha-Levi Abulafia from Burgos, the work deals with the benefits and qualities of Wisdom and Wealth, respectively, and the debate between the champions of each of them. Todros ha-Levi himself is described in the maqama as acting as judge between the two fictional rivals, Peleg and Yoqtan. The second satire by Ibn Shabbetay is a kind of polemic against five important Jewish personalities from Saragossa, who seem to have attacked him and burnt a book of his on the history of the great men of his time (cf. Navarro Peiro 1988: 54). This work was entitled Divre ha-‘alah we-hanidduy (“Words of Curse and Ban”).

In other cases there are inanimate things or abstract qualities which talk as though they were persons. For example, in the Tahkemoni by al-Harizi in maqama 39 there is a dispute between Day and Night, both of which say they are more important, and in maqama 40 there is a debate between the sword and the pen.
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8.1.4.1. Shem Tov Arduti'el, Ha-Et we-ha-Misparayim
Perhaps the most well-known debate is *Milhamot ha-et we-ha-misparayim* ("Struggle between Pen and Scissors") by Shem Tov ben Yishaq Arduti'el. He lived in the first half of the 14th century in the city of Carrión and later in Soria in the Castilian Kingdom. Shem Tov was identified with Don Santob de Carrión, composer of the extremely popular collection of the so-called *Proverbios Morales* (Baer 1966: 358, 447). Shem Tov was still familiar with the Arabic language, judging from some of his translations from Arabic into Hebrew. In fact, some descriptions of pen and scissors in the above mentioned maqama remind us of the descriptions and epigrams of the 10th-century Arabic poet Abū Ṭālib al-Ma'mūnī (van Bekkum 1991: 88). In the maqama the author tells how he was overcome by a cold winter on a stormy day in 1345 while living in Soria. The poet relates that he was sitting at home on a cold day, with snow and ice on the fields, when the people could not drink water because everything was frozen, and everybody was hiding himself for the cold, and did not go on the streets. The writer felt himself so desolated from his isolation during the snowstorm that he took pen and ink to get away from his loneliness. When he tried to dip the pen in the ink, his pen was broken since the ink was frozen. Then the writer reproaches the pen vehemently. But the pen defends itself in a long monologue, alternately in rhymed prose and metrical poems, blaming the cold. In this disastrous situation the poet hears a voice from someone that appears to be the scissors, which are made from steel and claim that an iron instrument is stronger than ten feathers of a wing, and reminds him that the writing of God is engraved on the Tablets of the Law (Ex. 32:16), arguing that they were engraved by two iron stilettos, which give the scribe great benefit. The pen reproaches the scissors for adopting the function of writing. In the debate that follows the author is looking for an arbiter and the pen finds an old man in the streets. Thereupon the scissors agree to give the decision between pen and sword," which is used in Hebrew by al-Ḥarīzī and Yaʿaqov ben Elʿazar, substituting the sword by a domestic instrument (Navarro Peiro 1988: 61, 62).

8.1.4.2. Yishaq ben Yosef Pulgar, Ezer ha-dat
Yishaq ben Yosef Pulgar (Pollegar or Poliqar), who lived in Castile during the first half of the 14th century, used the literary narrative style to write a work which belongs to the field of religious polemics. He wrote it in reaction to the attacks on Judaism by a friend from his youth, the convert Abner de Burgos, who changed his name to Alfonso de Valladolid after converting to Christianity. There is no direct response to Abner's attack in this work, but he wrote the book *Ezer ha-dat* ("The Help of Religion") with the intention of explaining the naturalness of Judaism from different points of view. The work consists of a prologue and five sections. The prologue and the second section are written in rhymed prose; in the other sections, some fragments are in rhymed prose, but most are in normal prose. It is considered to be the first example of religious polemic in maqama style (Navarro Peiro 1988: 62-63).

8.1.5. Fables and folklore

8.1.5.1. Abraham ibn Hasday, Ben ha-Melekh we-ha-Nazir
*Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir* ("The Prince and the Hermit") was translated into Hebrew by Abraham ibn Hasday in Spain at the end of the 12th or beginning of the 13th century (first printed edition: Constantinopole 1518). This work is an adapted version of the legend of the life of Buddha, also called *Josef and Barla'am* (in Christian sources) or *Bilawhar wa-Yiddasaf* (in Arabic sources). The Hebrew version by Abraham ibn Hasday is in rhymed prose in the style of Arabic maqamas, although the structure of the story has nothing to do with the usual picaresque maqama narrative. The story is about a prince whose father, a cruel and idolatrous king, wanted the troubles and sorrows of the world to be hidden from his son, who was born to him at old age, and orders him to be educated on an isolated island. The prince, however, is intelligent, and when a hermit visits the island and reveals how vain and full of death and illness human life is, the prince becomes indoctrinated and his only desire is now to be the prophet of God's word - which is exactly what his father, who earlier had expelled all the hermits from his kingdom, had tried to avoid.
8.1.5.2. Ya'qov ben El'azar, Kalila wa-Dimna

Kalila wa-Dimna comes from the Pancatantra, a work originally written in Sanskrit, but translated into Persian and then into Arabic. The book contains a number of animal tales (fables), which were meant to transmit the rules of conduct for kings and princes. The name is derived from Kalila and Dimna, two jackals, of which the first chapter speaks.

A scholarly Persian physician named Barzau wrote a long introduction, which was later translated into Arabic and Hebrew. Each chapter begins with a question King Dislam asks the "friend of wisdom" (philosopher) Sendebar, who replies with tales and parables, in which humanised animals play a conspicuous role. Other stories are often embedded in the stories, thus making them a complex entity.

8.1.5.3. Berekhyah ha-Naqdan, Mishle ha-Shu‘alim

Mishle ha-Shu‘alim ("Fox Fables") was written by R. Berekhyah b. Natronai ha-Naqdan, who lived in Normandy and perhaps also England during the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century. The book was printed in Mantua in 1557. The number of fables in this collection varies between 107 and 115 depending on the manuscript. They are written in the form of maqamas. Each has a motto comprising two lines (a proverb-like statement at the opening of the narrative). For instance, the Fable of the Fox has the following motto: "Many give advice for the benefit of themselves, to catch other people to eat them." It is a dialogue between the Fox and the Fishes: it is not really a story, but more of a parable on the right government and the right ruler. A Talmudic reference to R. Akiva (Ber. 61) is the source of this story. The Fable of the Camel and the Crowd of Camels has the motto: "Support weak hands if they are cooperating" and is about a camel which lay down and could not get up again. The others looked at it, and it asked them for help, saying that they should not go away without helping him up. They answered that he, too, has to cooperate. The fable of the Frogs, the Oak and the Snake has the motto: "Who lives in security in his world, does not need a lord." The frogs wanted a king. First they chose the oak, but the oak was not so successful because it could not speak or answer their questions. However, when they chose the snake, it ate the frogs whenever it was hungry. It would have been better for the frogs not to have a ruler. The Fable of the Mouse and the Hole, which has the motto "Who empowers himself with the riches of foreign people, in the manner he devours it, in the same way it will fade away" is reminiscent of Ibn Zabara's Meagre Fox and the Vineyard. The work has many parallels with the West-European Aesopian tradition. It is possible that Marie de France and Berekhyah had common sources in the West-European Isopet traditions.

8.1.6. Science

8.1.6.1. Abraham ibn Ezra, Hay ben Meqis

Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164), who was born in Tudela (Spain) and travelled through Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Italy and England, composed the philosophical maqama called Hay ben Meqis. In principle, the work is a translation from the Arabic work written by Avicenna (Ibn Sinā, 980-1037), but Abraham ibn Ezra changed the work into a maqama. Everything has an allegorical meaning, although much of it is understandable in the plain sense. The author tells how he with his human soul approaches an old sage called Hay ben Meqis ("Living son of Wakeful") from Jerusalem and makes a tour through the whole world of the created cosmos, first the lower world, Earth, an old and ancient land, with its four provinces: the human, the animal, the vegetative, and the inanimated. He has to travel through all the countries of the world, and to embrace them all in an exhaustive knowledge because it is he who possesses all the intelligibles. Starting by the microcosmos of the human being, whose body suffers from the horns of Satan: vices such as imagination, bad virtues such as anger, and desires, he must baptise himself and drink from the water of life to be able to fly in the sky. After the circles of water, air, wind, and fire, he visits the planets (Moon, Mercury, Mars, Venus, etc.), and he travels to the world of the eight spheres, represented as eight kingdoms. Both finally reach the Highest Sphere of heaven, the ninth. The heavens are described as spaces populated with the astral bodies, following Ptolemy. The ninth sphere is described as the dwelling place of the pure Intelligences. He reaches the outermost border a human being ever could reach, but the vicinity of the throne overpowers the author's longing to recognise the Creator more and more. The maqama shows the way to recognise Him in the multi-explainable answer: If you know your soul according to your capacity and force, then you can know and see Him. When asked by the traveler: "How will I know Him, as I am longing to see Him?" Hay ben Meqis answers: "If you support my sayings and keep my morals and go my ways and you will know your spirit, then you will be able to know Him and to see Him." (cf. El2, s.v. Hayy ibn Yakzan, by Goichon; Malach 900). The central theme in the action of Hay ben Meqis is the travelling through the hidden worlds.
under the guidance of a wise old man, which can be compared with the travel of Dante in his *Divina Commedia*.

8.1.6.2. Shemtov ibn Falaquera, *Sefer ha-Mevaqqesh*

In *The Book of the Seeker*, Shemtov ben Yosef ibn Falaquera (ca. 1225-1290; Navarra, Provence) uses a narrative scheme to express his scientific knowledge. In this work, a young student (ha-mevaqqesh; “the Seeker”) debates with people of various types in order to gain clarification of the road he must take. The protagonist of the work is a young man thirsty for knowledge who goes in search of wisdom. He visits the men who represent the different offices, professions and positions of his time. He speaks and discusses with them and receives instruction. In the first part of the book he meets seven persons: a rich man, a soldier, an artisan, a physician, a pious man, a grammarian and a poet. In the second part – which is written in plain prose – ten persons are interviewed, the last being a philosopher, who with his words full of peace prepares the seeker for his longed-for peace of mind. Following the advice of this philosophically trained scholar, he studies mathematics, astronomy, music, logic and natural science. However, he is not content until he has studied metaphysics (Navarro Peiro 1988: 60).

8.1.6.3. Ibn (Abi) Sahula, *Meshal ha-Qadmoni*

Yishaq ben Shelomoh ibn (Abi) Sahula lived in Guadalajara in the second half of the 13th century in Kabbalistic surroundings. He wrote this book in 1281 aspiring to create a Hebrew fable written in the form of a maqama, independent of foreign influences, basing himself on traditional learning such as the *Talmud* and the *Midrash* and to counter the books of the heretics and the wisdom of the Greek, and the stories of the Arabs and the Christians. In fact, however, it could not escape foreign influences. The moral lessons of the fables are Jewish and the animals are well versed in Jewish learning such as the *Talmud* and the *Bible*, but also other sciences. He deals with beasts and wild birds and the other animals that live on the islands. He subdivided the work into five chapters and each chapter into two sections, one featuring an opponent (*maqsheh*) and the other the author (*mehabber*), who is the one who resolves the difficulties. One person is the defect and the other the virtue. Each chapter is devoted to a certain virtue and quality. In the first, intelligence and wisdom are praised; in the second, repentance; in the third, good council; in the fourth, humility; and in the fifth, fear. In his *Variety in Medieval Rhymed Narratives* (1978: 94), Dan Pagis represents the structure of the book by means of three concentric circles. On the outside are the two protagonists, who are humans; in the second circle are the animals, the protagonists of the stories told by the humans; and in the third, the humans who appear in the stories of the animals (see also Navarro Peiro 1988: 45-50).

Another interesting point (cf. al-Hariri’s Arabic maqamas) is that the author has his stories illustrated: all 105 stories are accompanied by drawings, which were copied in other editions. According to the preface, the drawings are intended to teach the children, in order to discourage them from reading Homer and heretic and Epicurean writings.

8.1.7. Authors

In this survey we made use of the following works: *EJ* (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1971); *Dicionario* = Saenz Badillos (1988); Schirmann (1956); Navarro Peiro (1988); and ST II (= J. Schirmann 1997).

1. Shelomoh ibn Sahl / Ibn Saqbel (12th century)
2. Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164)
3. Yosef Ibn Zabara (ca. 1140-1190; Barcelona)
   - *EJ* 8/1211; *Dicionario* 200; Schirmann II: 11-59; Navarro 40-41, 43-45, 66, 69; 123-146; ST II: 110-129.
4. Yishaq author of the *Mishle ‘Arav* (“Tales of the Arabs”)
   - Schirmann II: 60-66; Navarro 57; ST II: 215-220.
5. Yehudah ibn Shabbetay (1168-1230; Toledo)
   - *EJ* 11/937; *Dicionario* 139-140; Schirmann II: 67-86; Navarro 39-42, 50-55, 57, 65, 68; 169-194; ST II: 137-144.
6. Yehudah al-Harizi (1165-1225)
   - *EJ* 7/1339; 2/627; 11/327, 937; 13/126; *Dicionario* 133; Schirmann II: 97-206; Navarro 34-42, 58-61; 63-65; 68-70; 93-122; ST II: 145-221.
7. Ya‘aqov ben El‘azar (12th-13th century; Toledo)
   - *EJ* 9/1216; 6/1266; *Dicionario* 119; Schirmann II: 207-237; Navarro 24-25, 42, 57-59; 61, 63, 69; 209-232; ST II: 222-255.
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8.1.8. Sources, translations, and bibliography

8.1.8.1. Hebrew sources


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### 8.1.8.2. Translations

Some of the editions include also translations, see 8.1.8.1; translations by Navarro Peiro (1988) are listed in 8.1.7.


Bereqha‘iy ha-Naqdan, *Mishle Shu‘alim*, translation into English by Moses Hadas (1967); translation into German by Lazarus Goldschmidt (1921); translation into Latin by Melchior Hanel S.J. under the title *Parabolae Vulpium rabbi Barachiae Nikdani*, Prague 1661.


### 8.1.8.3. Bibliography


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