
Schippers, A.

Published in:
Unknown

Citation for published version (APA):
Andalusian literature and culture, but also for the specialists in the field. The notes of the different chapters are of considerable aid. It is also the interesting problem of the "compunction" of the poets which deserves attention and which provides a good instrument for dealing with the history of Hebrew Andalusian literature. It is interesting not only for those who study Hebrew and Arabic, but for those interested in literary problems in general. The compunction of a poet is to be found in almost all literature.

Amsterdam/Leiden, January 1994

A. Schippers


Ibn Khalfūn (ca. 970-ca. 1020) is to be considered as one of the first poets of the new movement in Hebrew Andalusian poets who dedicated themselves to secular poetry in Biblical Hebrew in accordance with the Arabic poetic tradition. They were inspired by the themes of Classical Arabic poetry (especially those of poets such as Abu Nuwas, Abu Tammān and al-Mutanabbī) and took over the Arabic metre, adapted to their poetic Hebrew by their "founding father" Dunash ben Labraṭ (ca. 925-ca. 990). The name Ibn Khalfūn has been the object of many conjectures about its correct transliteration: here we will use Ibn Khalfūn [analogue to Ibn Zaydūn and Ibn Khaldūn], which is the proposed transliteration by Aharon Mirdsky who edited the Hebrew original (Jerusalem, 1961). There also exists a twelfth-century religious Yemenite Hebrew poet of approximately the same name (Abraham ibn Hālfūn or ben Hālfūn whose poems were edited recently by Yosef Tobi, Tel Aviv, 1991).

As far as our Yishāq ibn Khalfūn is concerned, the confusion about his name started rather early, when the famous eleventh-century poet and literary theorist Moses ibn Ezra (1055-1138), in his famous Kīṭāb al-Muḥādarah wa-l-Mudḥākarāh (31b), called him Ibn Hālfūn, but the consonants of the name have been preserved in several acrostichs and they point to Ibn Khalfūn or Ibn Khalfūn.

In the above-mentioned book, Moses ibn Ezra also mentions that Ibn Hālfūn was the first poet who made a living out of poetry. "He composed poems with the sole aim of getting presents; he travelled through many towns, being provided with everything he desired by the eminent". Now Carlos del Valle, head of the Hebrew department of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas in Madrid, has recently made a full translation into Spanish of Ibn Khalfūn's poems based on Mirdsky's edition, with an introduction and comments. This translation is especially interesting in view of the fact that three years earlier another translation in Spanish appeared by María José Cano, who is professor of Hebrew at the University of Granada [Yishāq ibn Jalfūn, Poeta cortesano cordobés, Ediciones El Almenandro, textos judeo-andalúsies, Córdoba, 1989 (17.75 cm, 108 pp.). ISBN 84-86077-66-4]. However, María José Cano's book is obviously less pretentious, the poems of her collection are not introduced or commented upon such as in the book by Carlos del valle Rodriguez, and she has left out poems which are dubious or too fragmentary. So from the start Carlos del Valle's book has the advantage of informing us more about the poems and of having justified a lot of his translations in learned notes. Del Valle also follows the order of the poems as it was in Mirsky's edition, mentioning even the manuscripts from which the Hebrew originals derive, whereas Cano directs herself to a less scholarly public, mentioning only some secondary sources in the preface, and arranging the poems by her own arrangement according to "genres": correspondence poems directed to Samuel ha-Nagid (without mentioning Samuel's answers), elegies, panegyrics, cantos de amigos y quejos and cantos de amor. However, some of Cano's cantos de amor would have fit in the cantos de amigos section, and the other sections or chapters have many overlaps with each other because this poetry consists mainly of occasional pieces, directed to Maecenates whom he addressed as were they friends and colleagues. The laudatory genre is the most developed genre in Ibn Khalfūn's poetry collection, and complaints about gifts and money he has not yet received for his poems, are a substantial part of this genre, next to praise. It is not surprising then, that a lot of introductions to his poems are devoted to general complaints about Time, but its abstract vicissitudes often refer to the fact that the poet is not paid enough for his poems by munificent patrons. The gifts are sometimes described in a concrete manner (the poet complains about receiving cheese [gehinah] instead of wine, at other times in a hidden manner: what does a gift of perfumed wood mean, in Arabic 'ud rajib and Hebrew 'ase besamim?

As far as non-laudatory poems are concerned, there are only some love poems directed to gazelles or fawns, and one of the correspondence poems (Mirdsky, no. 7) contains an eulogy of the wine, which is better than ordinary medicine, the wine being "a virgin, not known by a man, sealed from the day they took her" (= one of the well-known Abu Nuwasian stock motifs). A traditional nasib has been preserved in poem no. 20.

In Ibn Khalfūn's work, a prominent position is taken by the poet's correspondence with Samuel ha-Nagīd (993-1056), who was born in Córdoba and lived there until 1013 when the Berbers' riots took place, and he fled to Málaga. Ibn Khalfūn corresponds with the young Samuel, who at that time was not yet at the Granadian court of the Zirids (where he was kātib from 1020) and was not yet nagīd (leader of the Jewish community, which he was from 1027) and certainly not the leader of an army (which he was only from 1038, see also Del Valle, p. 20 note 15). Samuel was considerably younger than Ibn Khalfūn. Their acquaintance may have originated from Córdoba where Ibn Khalfūn passed part of his life, but after 1013 they lived in different towns, the latter apparently in Toledo. In Samuel ha-Nagīd's Diwān a lot of correspondence poems between them have survived. He was married to someone from the Ibn Caprōn family (to which the famous tenth-century Hebrew gramarian Yishāq ibn Caprōn belonged) and corresponds with Abu Sulayman David ibn Caprōn. According to some, he also wrote a poem to the famous Abu Ishqāq al-Mutawakkil ibn Ḥasan ibn Caprōn, known as Yequītel and famous as
Shelomo ibn Gabirol’s Maecenas in Saragossa and as a vizier of the Tujibid dynasty. But these attributions are with regard to poem no. 74, which is dedicated to a certain Abu Hasan, not ibn Hasan, and makes the above suppositions rather hazardous. Poem no. 44 refers to his divorce from the daughter of Ibn Caprón. It is a poem directed to Samuel ha-Nagid, and makes a pun of the name of the family (caprón = Romance for “goat”). In Del Valle’s edition the answers of Samuel ha-Nagid are mentioned too. The name pun on the Caprón family was later to be repeated by Solomon ibn Gabirol, who calls Yequitiel, his patron, “a hairy goat” (this must be another testimony for the living presence of the Romance language in the Arabic part of the Iberian peninsula).

As far as the translations are concerned, it is of course a luxury to have two translations of Ibn Khalfun’s work into Spanish within three years. This gives us the opportunity to compare the two translations with each other. The translation by Del Valle gives us the impression to be the most faithful according to Mirsky’s text, while Cano’s translation sometimes gives the impression of deviating from the original text and creating her own text: e.g., she reads the Spanish equivalent “men” instead of “fires” [poem no. 29, line 3; fawn is metonymic for the beloved lad or maiden, in view of the gazelle or fawn being some Arabic examples:

\[
\text{“Holly estã mi korazon, múltiples son sus penas, sus angustias, sus dolores, sus suertes, por los ojos de una consumadã bella ze, un corzo hermoso, para quien mi mal no reporta dolor a sus ojos”}. \]

Cano translates the poem as follows [p. 63]:

\[
\text{“La enfermedad de mi corazon, la cantidad de sus penas, sus congojas, sus dolencias y sus aflicciones están en los ojos del hermoso, el cervatillo gracioso; pero en cambio el mal no refleja dolor en sus ojos”.} \]

[The sickness of my heart, the quantity of its griefs, its anxieties, its distresses, its afflictions, are in the eyes of the beautiful one, the gracious fawn; but in change my sickness does not reflect grief in his eyes].

The above mentioned translations refer to the following Hebrew text of poem no. 20 (ed. Aharon Mirsky, p. 92, line 1):

\[
\text{“Holi libbi we-gam marbit yegonaw we-sarotaw umakhâbaw we-onav be-mo ñene khelil yofi, sebi hên / asher holi be-li makh‘ob be-ténaw”, which in my view has to be translated as follows:}
\]

1. The sickness of my heart, its abundant distress, its pangs, afflictions and sighs...
2. Is in the eyes of the one of perfect beauty, a gracious gazelle, in whose eyes is sickness without pain
3. A gazelle, who makes long the nights of his oppressed ones while sleeping himself in the bed of his nightly restplaces”.

The eyes of gazelles are described as sick and feverish because of their greatness and their coquettish aspect. They are always described as looking ill while being sound and making lovers really ill.

Thus the Arabic Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas (d. 915), who said about a gazelle or fawn:

\[
\text{“La enfermedad de mi corazon, la cantidad de sus penas, sus congojas, sus dolencias y sus aflicciones están en los ojos del hermoso, el cervatillo gracioso.”}
\]

And also:

\[
\text{“The recurrence of his glance is weak so that you would think that he is just recovering from a disease”}
\]

\[
\text{[da‘ifatu karri-l-tarfi tahsibu anna-ha qaribatu bi-l-ifqâqi min suqmi]}
\]

Ibn ‘Abi Awn (d. 933) in his Kitab al-Tashbihot [“Book of Comparisons”] devotes a whole chapter to this theme [a chapter about good comparisons on the sickness of the eye and its coquetry] citing a choice of Classical Arabic poets (ed. M. ‘Abdul Mu’id Khan, London, 1950, pp. 87-91). In his edition of Samuel ha-Nagid’s poems, Dov Yarden signaled this theme in poem no. 170, line 5 (p. 300, mentioning some Arabic examples:

\[
\text{“If you will be sick tomorrow because of one who is sick in his eyes (= a coquettish gazelle with beautiful eyes), then why should not you be sick today because of some one who is sick out of love (sc.l. me)?”}
\]

\[
\text{[we-im teheleh mahar le-holeh be-enaw / ha-lo teheleh hay-yom le-holeh ahatob /]}
\]

As far as the translations of the Arabic head texts of the Hebrew poems are concerned, they are in both translations almost entirely based on Mirsky’s renderings in Hebrew. Mirsky translates ba‘du with “after that”, whereas in combination with lam “not yet” as a translation would be preferable.
[wa-lam yakum ya'rifu-hu ba'du = “he did not know him yet”, see the heading of poem no. 63].

But these are small things. On the whole the present translations in Del Valle’s book make a solid impression. The additional notes and comments and the erudite introduction make his work a valuable contribution in the field of Hebrew Andalusian studies.

Amsterdam/Leiden, January 1994

A. SCHIPPERS

DIAZ ESTEBAN, F. — Abraham ibn Ezra y su tiempo. (Abraham ibn Ezra and his age), Actas del Simposio Internacional. Proceedings of the International Symposium, Madrid, Asociación Española de Orientalistas, 1990 (24 cm, 400 + 8 lám). ISBN 84-600-7500-1. 5189 PTS; $ 50.00; £ 27.00; 273 FF = DM 84,-.

This collection of papers consists of the proceedings of an international symposium which was held on the occasion of the ninth century of the birthday of Abraham ibn Ezra. Abraham ibn Ezra is one of the most remarkable persons of a period of transition of Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew scientific and grammatical literature. His birthday occurred just before the definitive arrival of the Almoravid dynasty in Muslim Spain when its leader, Yusuf ibn Tashufin, deposed the petty kings (Mulâk al-Tawâ f) one after another in 1090-91. With the arrival of the Almoravids, Andalusian culture was censured by strict orthodox Mâlikite fuqahâ’ who constituted an intolerant regime and imposed a tight control of the free expression of ideas. Thus the blossoming of poetry at the various courts came to an end after the Almoravid took over, both for Arabic and Hebrew. The results of the Christian reconquista created a violent polarization between Jews and Muslims. The Almohad dynasty who invaded Muslim Spain subsequently in the second half of the twelfth century, belonged to an even more intolerant and fanatic sect of Islam. They tolerated neither Jews nor Christians within their empire. There were mass-conversions of Jews to Islam. Many Jewish intellectuals fled into Christian Spain where they formed a link between Islamic and Romance Christian culture, while others made their way to the more tolerant Muslim East. Yehudah hat-Lewi had left Spain for Palestine and Egypt, where he died in 1140. Maïmonides and his family finally succeeded in leaving for Palestine and Egypt where they settled. Moses ibn Ezra already lived a life of exile in the Christian North (Saragossa), where he died c. 1138. Other exiles settled in Provence, where Hebrew rhymed prose literature in the style of the Arabs continued to flower along with Judeo-Arabic culture. Under Christian dominance Jewish scholars realized that the Arabic sphere of influence was waning and became aware of the fact that Judeo-Arabic was declining as a written means of communicating. Hebrew could now take the place of Arabic as a written prose language. Scholars now hardly wrote their linguistic and other dissertations in Arabic, but in Hebrew since their

hinterland now consisted not of Jews from an Arabic world but of those from Europe and Provence: in time Arabic would no longer be understood. The Christian rulers of Toledo used the Jews as translators: as bearers of Arabic culture they were indispensable for the translation of scientific Arabic texts into Latin.

Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164), who was born in the Northern part of Spain in Tudela, when his town still belonged to the reign of the Banû Hûd, was well aware of the decline of Judeo-Arabic culture. He mourned the destruction of the Jewish communities of al-Andalus by the Almoravids in a long poem, chosen for a wandering life and carried Andalusian Arabic and Jewish learning and literary taste to Christian Europe (Italy, France and England). As a poet he wrote more than 500 synagogal poems in which he introduced the popular schemes of muwashshahât strophic poetry. In his Hebrew version of the Arabic Hayy ibn Yaqzân, inspired by Avicenna he describes a journey through the whole cosmos leading to the highest heavenly sphere. Among his works in Arabic and Hebrew are treatises dealing with grammatical questions, biblical commentaries, mathematics, astronomy, astrology, and philosophy. His philosophy is essentially neo-Platonic, although it lacks a solid system.

The present collection of papers consists of an introductory article plus some 45 articles devoted to the phenomenon of Abraham ibn Ezra. It is impossible to go into the whole variety of subjects in the context of this short review. I would like to apologize for my subjective selection here which does not do justice to the bulk of the learned contributions, most of which are of outstanding quality. Therefore I would like to single out some of the articles. The last article in the Abraham ibn Ezra volume, written by Josef Yahalom (Hebrew University, Jerusalem), is entitled “The Poetics of Spanish Piyyut in Light of Abraham ibn Ezra’s Critique of its Pre-Spanish Precedents”. Yahalom describes how Abraham ibn Ezra, during his stay in Rome, came into contact with the piyyutim of Eres Yisra’el, which constituted for him “a cultural clash which shook the poet to the depths of his soul” (p. 387). Because of his Spanish education he represented in Rome the aesthetic values of Arabic poetry as inherent to Hebrew poetry. His grammatical work Sefer Sahot [recently published by Del Valle Rodriguez, A.S.] composed in Mantua included a chapter on quantitative Hebrew Metrics in the Arabic style. He severely criticized piyyutim by Eleazar bi-Rabbi Qallir [now usually called bi-rabbi Qilir, A.S.] of the kind of the poem that begins as qoṣṣèš ben qoṣṣèš qeṣṣèšay le-qasset which sounded awful in his ears. In his comments on Ecclesiastes/Qohele 5:1 he condemns the piyyutim forged by Eleazar bi-Rabbi Qallir and his colleagues. They should have been better poets or become silent, as the wisdom in Ecclesiastes makes clear: “Do not be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter anything before God”. Then the author goes into further comments by Abraham ibn Ezra on defects of pre-Spanish piyyutim.

The article by Luis Vegas Montaner (Universidad Complutense, Madrid), entitled “El poema de Aijedrez de Abraham ibn Ezra” consists of a critical textual edition of the Chess poem by Abraham ibn Ezra. The popular game of chess was introduced into Europe by the Jews. It was often a forbidden game, only allowed by the religious authority on the condition that people did not play for money. There was

---

6) I thank Abraham ibn Ezra specialist Dr. Irene Zwiep (University of Amsterdam) for her remarks about this collection of articles in a letter dated 15-1-1992.