Hebrew Andalusian Elegies and the Arabic Literary Tradition
Schippers, A.

Published in:
Hidden Futures, Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World

Citation for published version (APA):
Hebrew Andalusian Elegies and the Arabic Literary Tradition

Arie Schippers

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, Hebrew literature was essentially a part of a religious tradition. This, however, changed in the tenth century CE, when in Muslim Spain (al-Andalus) Jewish poets began to compose secular Hebrew poetry and inaugurated the 'Golden Age of Hebrew Andalusian' poetry which reached its apogee under the Parti kings (Muluk al-iawa'if) in the eleventh century. The existence of several courts resulted in a competition that stimulated cultural life. This emancipation of Hebrew literature can be explained by the special position the Jews occupied in al-Andalus, as compared with the other regions of the diaspora.

This special position was the result of several historical factors. In the first place, the relationship between the Muslim rulers and the Jewish community was a good one. The Jews, who had been living on the Iberian peninsula from the first century, had welcomed and even helped the Muslim conquerors in the eighth century. They saw them as their liberators since they had been oppressed by the Visigoth rulers. A second peculiarity was that Jews were not confined to certain professions but were to be found in all walks of life: among them were wage labourers, artisans, merchants and landowners. There were even exclusively Jewish cities such as Lucena and Granada. But perhaps most important for the development of Hebrew literature was the fact that there were Jews serving in high offices at Muslim courts. They often acted as Maecenases for Jewish scholarship and art.

1 I use the term Hebrew Andalusian poetry in contrast with Arabic Andalusian poetry. The term Andalusian Arabic poetry is occasionally used in contrast with Oriental Arabic poetry.

2 More information on the subject is to be found in Arie Schippers, Arabic Tradition & Hebrew Innovation, Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry (Amsterdam, dissertation Institute for Modern Near Eastern Studies 1988), 290-338 and Arie Schippers, Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition, (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1994), 244-286.

3 Muslim Spain was divided into several Muslim kingdoms led by ethnic Arabs, Berbers, Slavs, or Africans. In the eleventh century there was a rich cultural life at the courts, which competed with each other in wine drinking and poetry parties. Cf. for political history and the position of the Jews: Eli Ashtor, The Jews of Muslim Spain, (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society 1973, 1979, 1984), I-II; David Wulread, The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings; Politics and Society in Islamic Spain, 1002-1086, (Princeton, University Press 1985); Raymond P Scheindlin, 'The Jews in Muslim Spain', in The Legacy of Muslim Spain, S.Kh. Jayyusi, ed., (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1992), 188-200.
One of the branches of Jewish scholarship that flourished in al-Andalus was Hebrew grammar. Hebrew had already disappeared in the second century as a spoken language, to be replaced first by Romance and later by vernacular Arabic. Inspired by the methods of the Arab grammarians who studied the Classical Arabic language, the focus of Hebrew grammatical studies was on the Classical Hebrew of the Holy Writ. These studies were greatly encouraged by the famous Maecenas and Cordoban vizier Hasdai ibn Shaprut (ca. 910-970). The Hebrew poets tried to demonstrate that Classical Hebrew had the same possibilities as Classical Arabic for composing poetry and used it for correspondence in courtly circles and among friends, and for elegies. One of the first Hebrew poets to make a living out of poetry was Ibn Khalfun (ca. 970-ca. 1020), who travelled around and sang the praise of high and influential Jewish statesmen and merchants. In this Hebrew Andalusian poetry the metres and themes were adopted from Arabic poetry. Like in Arabic literature, we find here poems dedicated to wine, love, nature and war, and laudatory and elegiac poetry.

In the following, we will try to show the dependence of the Hebrew Andalusian poets on their Arabic examples, mostly Eastern Arabic poets. In doing so we will use examples from the four main poets of the Golden Age, namely Samuel ha-Nagid (993-1055), Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021-1058), Moses ibn Ezra (1055-1138), and Yehudah ha-Lewi (1075-1141). We will show how these poets in the expression of their feelings about death and immortality made use of motifs and images borrowed from ancient Arabic poetic tradition. This does not imply that their feelings were not intense or serious enough. They just considered these Arabic themes and motifs, put into Classical Hebrew language, the best way to convey their feelings.

The main genre in Arabic literature is the qasida, a monorhymic and monometric poem of 20 to 60 lines. In Muslim Spain, Arabic poets also invented a strophic genre, consisting of several rhymes and metres, called muwashshah ('girdle poem', the girdle being the refrainlike end of each of five strophes). Both forms are also used in elegies. The themes and motifs of these elegies can be traced back to the sixth century poetry of the Arabian peninsula. Unlike the other poems, the elegiac poems did not begin with an amatory introduction (nasih). Instead, they began with the following motifs:

1. Descriptions of weeping and crying: hot tears and eyes tired because of sleepless nights. Sometimes 'repprechasers' ('awadhiti) intervene: now you have wept enough. Descriptions of sorrow and affliction. Participation of the universe (cosmos, animals, doves, other human beings) in the poet's grief.
2. "Consolation" motifs: proverbs concerning the irreversibility of Fate, the transitoriness of earthly life, and the perfidy and faithlessness of the World. Every living being is doomed to die.
3. The weeping over the effaced traces of the grave of the deceased. The poet tries to make contact with the person who is buried, but to no avail. He addresses him, but gets no answer. This motif resembles the amatory introduction to other motifs of the qasida, where the poet wept at the abandoned campsite of his beloved.

In the middle of the elegies we find the following motifs:
4. Laudatory passages on the deceased.
5. Condolences by members of the family of the deceased; laudatory passages on the Maecenas.

At the end we often find:
6. Invocation of and address to the deceased person and benediction of him and the grave: 'May a rain fall upon it!' which is partly identical with the motif mentioned under 3.

4 See Angel Saez-Badillos and Judi Targarona Borrés, Diccionario de autores judios (Sefrejud. Siglos X-XV). (Córdoba, El Almendro 1980), 50-51.
5 See Saez Badillos, Diccionario, 162-163.
6 I use the term 'themes' to indicate clusters of motifs, referring to contents and meaning: "genre" is used especially with regard to poetic forms. "Motifs" are small meaningful units.
7 Saez Badillos, Diccionario, 108-109: quotations from the poetry of Samuel ha-Nagid according to the numbers of the poems: see Samuel ha-Nagid (Shemuel ibn Naghrila), Diwan (Ben Tahlim), Ed. Dev Yarden, (Jerusalem 1966).
10 Saez Badillos, Diccionario, 137-138: quotations from hal-Lewi according to the numbers of the poems: see Yehudah hal-Lewi, Diwan, Ed. H.Brody, (Berlin 5664/1904), II.
13 See Werner Cazkel, Das Schicksal in der altarabischen Poesie (Leipzig 1926).
As far as formal features of the elegies are concerned we find through the whole poem:
7. Parallel structures, like internal rhyme, repetition of the name of the deceased, etc.

In order to show how the Hebrew Andalusian elegiac poetry is indebted to Arabic elegiac poetry I shall deal in the following with four motifs: the participation of the whole universe in the grief, the consolation motifs, benediction formulas, and finally the impact of the deceased’s status on the elegy.

PARTICIPATION OF THE UNIVERSE IN THE GRIEF

In the elaboration of this Arabic elegiac motif one finds a cosmic ‘animism’, which personifies as weeping entities sun and moon, stars, clouds, mountains, animals and the collectiveness of the world.

Samuel han-Nagid, in his (Hebrew Andalusian) elegy (poem no. 84) for the son of Rabbi Nissim, describes the participation of the universe in weeping in lines 5-6. It is as if common human beings do not know that heaven and its clouds are in distress because of his death, as are the crops in the field:

5. It is as if you [ungrateful human beings] did not know that heaven and its clouds are in great grief because of his calamity;
6. The harvest and vintage are in great pain, and the rain and the lightning experience disaster.

In poem no. 85 Samuel han-Nagid describes how the world is in confusion because of the death of Hay Ga’on (939-1038), the most important spiritual and juridical Jewish authority in Baghdad:

73. Alas! The sons of Earth are burning, and the World is in great confusion!
74. The inner moods are in the hands of the people; they are not doing their business.

When the stars hear about the execution, April 1039, of Abu Ishaq al-Mutawakkil ibn Hasan ibn Capron, known as Yequtiel and famous as Shelomo ibn Gabirol’s Maecenas in Saragossa and as a vizier of the Tujibid dynasty, they become extinguished, according to Solomon in his elegy (poem no. 156/194: line 27):

4. For me are mourning the stars of Heaven; and for me are weeping the moon and the sun;
5. Until daybreak my heart trembles, and my ear is uncovered and deafened by the noise of its voice.

In a poem (no. 229) on the death of Abu Ishaq Abraham, one of the sons of his sister, the poet describes his own grief and that of the universe:

28. The stars of Orion remove their splendour because of their death, while the sky’s garment is a coat of darkness;
29. And the morning star is wrapped in darkness and howling, and every friend weeps for his friend;
30. If there could be made a ransom for a living being, then the Great Bear would make a ransom of its own children.


Before Islam the Arab pagan poets saw blind, irreversible Fate as the dominating power in their lives. This notion figured prominently in Arabic elegiac poetry. Life in this World was called treacherous, since no one knew what it had in store for him. Since the coming of Islam, these pre-Islamic notions continued to have their place in elegies, sometimes juxtaposed with Islamic concepts. This could result in a certain scepticism, as expressed in an elegy composed by the Arabic poet al-Mutanabbi:

43. People are in disagreement about death, and there is only consensus about the fact of death.


15 Mercedes Eneros and Angeles Navarro, "Moses Ben ‘Ezra; elegias a la muerte de su hermano José", Miscelaneas de Estudios Arabes y Hebraicos 32. 2 (1983), 51-68.
17 Elegy on the elder sister of Sayf al-Dawla, see Abu l-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi. Diwan. ed. Fredericus Dietrichl. (Berlin 1861), poem no. 238.
44. Some say man's soul survives safe and sound, and others say it shares the destruction of the body.\textsuperscript{18}

Hebrew Andalusian poets also made use of this motif of blind Fate, to which they usually referred with expressions such as 'Time', or 'the Days' and 'the Nights'. In an elegy on a friend (poem no. 105), Samuel han-Nagid, comforting the deceased's relatives, discusses the untrustworthiness and unreliability of Life and Earth: benefactors die as much as fools. Life is a bad dream. Life and Death are two quarreling women. People give birth to sons; Time gives birth to catastrophes, which annihilate human beings. There is hardly a son that does not witness his father's death, but the father is also deprived of his sons (lines 1-9). Part of the text runs as follows:

5. Life and Death, there is no honest justice between them: they judge every soul;
6. Between them is hostility, like the hostility of two quarreling women, who have nevertheless one husband;
7. This man destroys what his friend has built, like wrongdoers, but they are no young boys (urchins);
8. Mankind gives birth and Time generates: the sons of man are to be eaten by the sons of Time;
9. If the son does not behold the death of [his] father at least then the sons of the father, during the life of their father, are bereft [of their children].

Similar thoughts are expressed by Moses ibn Ezra (in poem no. 117): innocents and sinners have the same fate (lines 45-53):

48. The innocent and the impious are given to drink from one and the same cup, and their fate is like the fate of beasts;
49. A man is born naked and will go away when his soul is destitute of the World's labour.
50. He will leave his functions behind him for another and cannot take anything, even the slightest, with him on the day that he shall go.
51. His deeds accompany him to his grave to give him rest, when his behaviour has been perfect.
52. The car in which the man goes to his grave to annihilation will be harnessed from [his birth];
53. Death is indeed like a sickle, and we are like the harvest which is ripe and standing.


In another poem (no. 229) Moses ibn Ezra speaks about unjust Time, and he mentions the general character of Death. The World is transitory and untrustworthy (lines 44-54), although the young Abraham's only interest is in holy and durable things (lines 55-57). The following lines forcefully express the transitoriness of life:

51. The cup of Death is mixed in the hands of the Days, and drinking of its wine is a custom for every living being.
52. O man! Of what avail to you is the pursuit of honour in the World! What use to you are the riches you have gathered?
53. What benefit is there for you to extract honey from bitterness: after a while you will vomit it up.

The 'Life is a Dream' motif that we find occasionally in Arabic Andalusian poetry occurs frequently in Hebrew Andalusian elegies. Samuel ha-Nagid says e.g. in his poem no. 30: line 13:\textsuperscript{20}:

13. Your World is like a dream, and in your old age you find many of its explanations; in your Death you will find all its solutions.

In Solomon ibn Gabirol's elegy (poem no.156/194) on his above-mentioned Maecenas Yequti'el, we find the following consolation motif combined with a criticism of all people who believe in slogans like 'Life is a Dream': the fact that Yequti'el's days now have come to an end indicates that the cosmos has been created in order to perish. The poet adjures mankind to pay attention to the fact that Time had already, before their birth, arranged their grave. The Days of Time give here and take there, so that you are led to believe that men are merchandise (lines 1-3):

2. Pay attention in order that you may know that Time arranges graves for people, when they are not even born!
3. Its Days take people and they give other people, so that I think that they make bargains with mankind.
4. I do not know it, just as all the wise people whose names are known did not know...
5. Whether the souls despised the bodies or the living spirits are urged to go up.
6. How foolish are those who say: 'The World is a dream!' How could they have forgotten a thing and not remember it any more.

\textsuperscript{19} An elegy on the death of his nephew (son of his sister): wa-nu'iya ilay-hi Abu Ishaq ibn ukhti-hi tuwuffiya shenat [the death of Abu Ishaq, his sister's son, was announced to him in the year] 4882 = 1122.

\textsuperscript{20} See also Samuel han-Nagid, Ben Qohelet, ed. S. Abramson, (Tel Aviv 5713/1953), no. 272, which is identical.
Like al-Mutanabbi in his elegy, quoted before, Ibn Gabirol expresses the uncertainties of the mysteries of Death, which human beings cannot solve. Dreams are vain and cannot be explained (line 7). The poet continues with his consolation concerning the World: the World has arranged an ambush for the fatigue of mankind (line 8). It is interesting that the poet speaks about the covenant of the kings of the earth with Death or the Underworld: but this covenant has now become void and without value. Prophets summoned mankind to show repentance, but the people did not respond. Princes as well as servants have to descend suddenly to the grave, without regard for their state. Princes cannot take their riches; they have to leave behind them everything except the rags in which they are buried. They are locked up under the earth (lines 9-17). The poet addresses himself to Death. He looks just, because he redeems the poor from their life and makes rich people stumble. Even if the mighty ones mock at you, they become like nails from terror. If the fire falls upon the cedars, how can the mosses on the wall escape from it? (lines 18-21). The poet does not know why the Days have despised him and why they have chosen precisely him. They have taken away the chosen people of the earth. The poet knows that the deeds of the Days have given birth to calamities. He knows that They have sinned consciously. Do not trust the Days, do not make a treaty with Them, although they look like the Angel of the Covenant. If the Days have promised to annihilate all precious things, they have performed their promise (lines 28-32).

World and Time are described basically as treacherous in Hebrew Andalusian poetry. Moses ibn Ezra seems to think in an elegy on his brother Yosef (poem no. 117) that Time apparently has wanted to take revenge on him (lines 7-14): Time wants to destroy all the sons of his father. It does not spare even the little boys and girls of his family, whereas, in former times, Time used to serve the poet humbly:

9. In former times It ran to comply with the wishes of my heart and my longings as a slave or a maid-servant;
10. Such is Its custom in making itself odious to the innocent and making pacts with men of blood and treason.
11. Its favour is abundant for every rogue, but Its [scant] measure for every generous person is abominable.
12. Every innocent walks barefoot, while every brother of evil washes his feet in oil;
13. Time has decided to let me live, but to let my brothers die: how mendlously It has behaved, full of treason;
14. It has given me to eat the bitterness of its wrath and to drink the venom of its anger and fury.

Here the poet stresses the injustice of Time, taking away the innocent, whereas the wicked people are allowed to stay alive. The poet considers also that his brothers deserved more to stay alive than he himself.

The motif of the treacherous World by Moses ibn Ezra can also be found in another poem (no. 141):

1. The one who puts to the test treacherous Time will meet in it a beloved one who hides the mantle of the hater he is in reality.

In Arabic poetry e.g. by al-Mutanabbi, we can observe that the poet imagines that his Maecenas had in vain tried to make a deal with Fate. In Hebrew Andalusian literature we see this motif expressed by both Samuel ha-Nagid and Moses ibn Ezra. In his Muhadarah14 (129b) Moses ibn Ezra quotes as an example of tasdir23 the following line:

He thinks that Time will perform his will unto a good end, but [Time] itself does not think so.

In panegyrics Fate, Time, the Days and their vicissitudes stay in opposition to the Maecenas, the just and mighty ruler, to whom Fate is subdued. In elegies, Fate and its calamities have won. Fate here has to be considered in opposition to God, whose benediction is asked on the grave by means of a raincloud which drenches the grave grounds.

BENEDICTION FORMULAS

The early Islamic poet Mutammim ibn Nuwayra asks God to send rain clouds to the grave of his brother Malik25. The benediction is asked from God:

23. I say, while the flashes light the cloud-fringe below the black, and down from the dark mass pours the rain in a scattering flood:
24. 'May God grant the land where lies the grave of my brother dear the blessings of showers at dawn, and cover the ground with green.'

The same motif we find in Arabic Andalusian poetry:

22 Ibidem.
23 Schippers, Arabic Tradition, 311; Schippers, Spanish-Hebrew Poetry, 262: 'Fate has made a deal with Sayf al-Dawlah by taking away the younger sister and sparing the elder one [poem no. 231 of al-Mutanabbi's Diwan (ed. Dieterici), lines 12-13] [...]. But Time deceives Sayf al-Dawlah, as we see in the elegy on the elder sister Khawlah (no. 238) because now Death has also taken Khawlah.' See also Winter, "Content", 342.
25 Beginning and ending the line with the same word.
In Hebrew Andalusian poetry this motif is used too as the following examples show:

26. May He drench his grave with clouds, may He shed morning showers on his dust.
3. May He (the Rock= God) drench the rock of her grave with the waters of a cloud so that she may never fear a desert.
50. May a cloud drip to drench her grave with the waters of good will, and may a layer of dew rise early in the morning.
39. May her grave flower like an irrigated garden and be watered at every moment with the dew of the morning.

From the examples quoted above, it will be clear that both in the Arabic and Hebrew Andalusian elegiac poetry, several pre-Islamic concepts have inspired the most commonly used motifs: cosmic animism, fatalism, and the belief in a high status of the deceased greatiy affected the contents and style of the elegy. As in Arabic poetry, important leaders and learned men, if they are the object of an elegy, are addressed in a great and magnificent manner. But if the deceased was a relative or friend, the poem as a rule is shorter and more informal.

Natiu'ally, the status of the deceased greatly affected the contents and style of the elegy. As in Arabic poetry, important leaders and learned men, if they are the object of an elegy, are addressed in a great and magnificent manner. But if the deceased was a relative or friend, the poem as a rule is shorter and more informal. Women and children offered some problems to the poet, since it was difficult to deal with their personal lives: this was true for women, since they did not participate in public life, and for children because they had not left the protection of the family circle and achieved memorable feats.

In Hebrew Andalusian poetry this motif is used too as the following examples show:

26. May He drench his grave with clouds, may He shed morning showers on his dust.
3. May He (the Rock= God) drench the rock of her grave with the waters of a cloud so that she may never fear a desert.
50. May a cloud drip to drench her grave with the waters of good will, and may a layer of dew rise early in the morning.
39. May her grave flower like an irrigated garden and be watered at every moment with the dew of the morning.

From the examples quoted above, it will be clear that both in the Arabic and Hebrew Andalusian elegiac poetry, several pre-Islamic concepts have inspired the most commonly used motifs: cosmic animism, fatalism, and the belief in a high status of the deceased. These three most commonly used motifs: cosmic animism, fatalism, and the belief in a high status of the deceased greatiy affected the contents and style of the elegy. As in Arabic poetry, important leaders and learned men, if they are the object of an elegy, are addressed in a great and magnificent manner. But if the deceased was a relative or friend, the poem as a rule is shorter and more informal. If, of all children, he, rather than another child, has had to die, what kind of pride can fathers have in their children any more? (lines 7-11).

Most of Samuel han-Nagid’s elegies are devoted to the death of his brother Yishaq Abu Ibrahim. His elegies on family members give us a good idea of how people of his time dealt with distress and mourning. Yishaq’s death moved him deeply, in view of the many poems which he dedicated to him: nearly every stage, from death-bed to burial, is described in a separate poem. The first elegy (poem no. 86) was composed when Yishaq was lying on his deathbed (in the year 441/1050/4810). The elegies for Yishaq are mostly very short. The disease worsens, and in the next poem the poet tells of his desire to pay a visit to his brother accompanied by the physician, but halfway they meet a man who announces that Yishaq has just died (no. 87). Other poems follow. One of these deals with the tearing of his clothes as a token of his mourning (no. 89). Then comes a long poem in which he calls to memory his brother’s death, and the passing away of three other family members (no. 90). A short poem relates his entry into the funeral parlour, where his brother is lying in state (no. 91). The poet describes kissing his brother. Poem no. 92 describes how his brother is dressed for the grave and how he is put into the grave. In poem no. 93 the poet comforts people who are weeping and mourning because of his brother’s death: then follow two poems composed after a visit to his brother’s grave on the second day after the burial (nos. 94, 95). Then follows a poem after his return from the grave, when he arrives at his working place, surrounded by a multitude of people (no. 96).

In an elegy for a young child of Rabbi Nissim, Samuel han-Nagid comforts the father.44 We see in this poem some of the same motifs that are present in the elegy for Abu-I-Hayja’ by al-Mutanabbi. In a passage in which he praises the father, rabbi Nissim, he says: the father has met with a paradoxical disaster. His only child has been nipped in the bud, while the father is a unique person in the world. In the time after the period of lactation, his spring has been uprooted, although its root was a king (i.e. rabbi Nissim), who granted abundant gifts; he who supported those who were oppressed and stumbled, has now stumbled himself because of the loss of his offspring. He has not even had the pleasure of teaching him with a slate (luhot), he who used to bear him to the Commandments (luhot) of the Covenant as bracelets. If, of all children, he, rather than another child, has had to die, what kind of pride can fathers have in their children any more? (lines 7-11).

Then comes a long poem in which he calls to memory his brother’s death, and the passing away of three other family members (no. 90). A short poem relates his entry into the funeral parlour, where his brother is lying in state (no. 91). The poet describes kissing his brother. Poem no. 92 describes how his brother is dressed for the grave and how he is put into the grave. In poem no. 93 the poet comforts people who are weeping and mourning because of his brother’s death: then follow two poems composed after a visit to his brother’s grave on the second day after the burial (nos. 94, 95). Then follows a poem after his return from the grave, when he arrives at his working place, surrounded by a multitude of people (no. 96).

27 Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim ibn Sina (8th/14th century), see Lisan al-Din ibn al-Khatib, Al-Katiba al-Kamina, ed. Ihsan 'Abbas (Beyrouth 1979), 213.
29 Ibn Hamdis, Diwan, 522 (poem no. 330).
30 Samuel han-Nagid, Diwan, poem no. 105.
31 Moses ibn Ezra, Diwan, poem no. 3 on Abu Yahya ibn al-Rabb's wife.
32 Moses ibn Ezra, Diwan, poem no. 53 on Yoshiah ibn Bazazz's sister.
33 Moses ibn Ezra, Diwan, poem no. 53 on Yoshiah ibn Bazazz's sister.
34 Moses ibn Ezra, Diwan, poem no. 84.
35 Arie Schippers, "Abu Tamman's unofficial elegies," Acts of the 10th Congress U.E.A.I. Edinburgh 1980 (Edinburgh 1982), 101-106, especially 104: 'It is amusing to see how al-Mutanabbi succeeds in describing the virtues of this child, who did not even reach the age when he could walk, but for whom enemies were already trembling in view of his future bravery.'
Poems nos. 97, 98, 100 and 103 remember Yishaq’s death, respectively, a week, a month, and a year after his death. There is also a poem about his going to the grave, which is interrupted half-way (no. 99). Samuel han-Nagid describes in poems nos. 94 and 99 how he unsuccessfully tries to make contact with his deceased brother:

94:1. Alas! I returned home in the distress of my soul, may God show favour to you, O my brother!
2. I buried you in the grave yesterday and even to-day is my complaint bitter (Job 23:2);
3. Peace be with you! Don’t you hear that I am calling you with all my forces?
4. Answer me: do you recognize the answer to my elegies by my crying?
5. How are you lodging in your grave on the dust in the house of mins?
6. Are your bones already becoming weak, and are your teeth in your face removed from their place?
7. Has your freshness flown away in one night, for my freshness has gone away because of the weeping;
8. I have left you, O elder son of my father, as a deposit in the hand of the One who has produced me;
9. I trust in the One who made my hope, that you will go unto peace (Psalm 22:10).[9]

99:1. Is there a sea between me and you, that I should not turn aside to be with you;
2. That I should not run with a troubled heart to sit at your grave-side?
3. Truly, if I did not not do so, I would be a traitor to our brotherly love!
4. O my brother, here I am, facing you, sitting by your grave;
5. And the grief for you in my heart is as great as on the day you died;
6. If I greeted you, I would hear no reply.
7. You do not come out to meet me when I visit your grounds.
8. You will not laugh in my company, nor I in yours.
9. You cannot see my face, nor I yours.
10. For the pit is your home, the grave your dwelling-place!
11. First-born of my father, son of my mother, may you have peace in your final rest;
12. And may the spirit of God rest upon your spirit and your soul!
13. I am returning to my own soil, for you have been locked under the soil.
14. Sometimes I shall sleep, sometimes wake – while you lie in your sleep forever.
15. But until my last day, the fire of your loss will remain in my heart!

Samuel han-Nagid also composed an elegy about the books which will not appear any more since his brother Yishaq is dead (no. 101). Whenever the poet sees other people mourning a family member, he is prompted to weep again over the loss of his brother (no. 102). He also composed a consolation poem devoted to his brother’s death (no. 104). Of all his elegies and mourning poems (24 to 26) 19 deal with his brother.

Moses ibn Ezra composed elegies for his brother Abu-l-Hajjaj Yusuf or Yosef. In one of these elegies (no. 113), he manifests his great affliction concerning his brother, whose glory will remain forever, although his body is decomposing (lines 26-27). In this elegy the poet describes how far away he is from his brother; he addresses his brother in the following way (no. 113):

28. Alas! I wish I could save you, O my brother, but Death will strike me before I will come near to you;
29. I was in my lifetime in exile because I was separated from you; now I want a grave as a part of your inheritance;
30. I call to [the grave] to a distant person: ‘I wish I had a grave ‘and then I dig my grave next to you.

In some of the short mourning pieces of Moses ibn Ezra, we can see the embarrassment of a poet when the deceased is a young boy, an embarrassment similar to that to be found in Abu Tammam’s poem for the young boy Humayd37. The death of Moses ibn Ezra’s young son Ya’qob inspired four small poems (nos. 32, 97, 135, 171). These poems are simple in tone, as can be seen from the following examples; no. 32 runs as follows:

1. The name of Ya’qob has perished, but the plant of his calamity has increased in my heart;
2. I weep in order to annihilate it, but it increases instead! Because a plant grows immensely by watering.

In the poem little is said about Ya’qob: it consists only in describing the father’s sadness by means of a rhetorical device, called in Arabic husn al-ta’lit or ‘good argumentation’, which indicates a kind of fantastic paradox. Other elegies on his little son go as follows:

97:1. My heart went away to behold Ya’qob: he travelled dead on the arms of his bearers;
2. Apart from them we shall never see anyone in the world who buried a star in dust.

135:1. The day on which Ya’qob expired, the sound of my violin turned to mourning;

37 Schippers “Abu Tammam’s unofficial elegies”, 103: ‘1. Humayd is dead. But what soul remains on earth without dying?; 2. I weep for him with tears in my eye like scattered pearls. 3. He was but an inexperienced boy, when Fate made him ill. I will never forget him, as long as I live. 4. It is impossible to find any praise for his qualities, so the best thing I can do is maintain silence.’
2. As for that day, let darkness seize upon it; may this day of evil and bitterness be annihilated!

17:1:1. My tears flow from the warmth of my heart, whose twelve rags are torn;
2. It is a constant duty to weep for a dear son, a child who was gladness.

These three poems have almost no laudatory motif, but only mourning and weeping, sometimes with clear reminiscences of expressions of Biblical language, e.g. poem 135 which reminds us of Job 30:33 and 3:6 and - to a lesser extent - Amos 8:10 and Jeremiah 2:19.

As for poem 97, here there is some laudatory motif: the heavenly qualities of the deceased are contrasted with the dust in which he is buried.

One of the most delicate elegies on a woman by Yehudah ha-Lewi is the one on his little daughter: in elegy no. 33 (lines 16-23), the poet describes the deceased girl as a rose or a lily plucked before her time, whose image is before the eyes of the poet like phylacteries. How his tears flow like a river! How can it be that the daughter of the constellation of the Great Bear is now gathered in the womb of the dust! How can a sun revolve with the worms, while the cords of the subterranean vault are a diadem for her head? Then this verse is closed with the usual refrain in which the poet repeats: 'O daughter, there is no judge who can help in any way with your case, because Death separates you from me'. In this poem - as in other elegies we have seen - the contrast between her heavenly qualities and her actual subterranean state is made again.

The same poem contains a dialogue between the mother and the daughter, described by the poet:

1. 'Alas, my daughter, have you forgotten your home?
2. The coffin bearers have taken you to the grave,
3. And I have nothing left of you but your memory.
4. I take pity on the dust of your tomb,
5. When I come to greet you, and do not find you:
6. For Death has made a separation between me and you'.[...]
33. 'Alas, my daughter, what sorrow you have brought me!'
34. 'Alas, alas! my mother, that you ever gave me birth;
35. How, on this day, how could you cast me off?
36. O, you brought me up to be Death's bride!
37. When my turn came, you sent me away alone;
38. You crowned me with a garland of dust;
40. It was against your will, O my mother, it was not according to your will;
41. Because Death has made a separation between me and you.'

Elegies on a daughter were not uncommon in the Arabic world. In a recent article and lecture, T. Emil Homerin gives us a whole series of elegies on a daughter of an Egyptian religious scholar Abu Hayyan, who also tried to contact the girl once she was buried in the grave. In his article, Homerin also refers to some elegies on daughters in previous periods in Classical Arabic literature.

The quotations in this passage are all from 'personal' elegies which show more intimacy than the more solemn and longer elegies on great viziers and scholars such as Hay Ga'on and Yequ'el, from which we have quoted some samples in previous sections. However, in one respect there is a difference with Arabic elegies on important men: Jewish viziers are almost exclusively praised because of their intellectual capacities, and not because of their bravery in warfare, as in the case of their Arab counterparts. Both, however, are praised for their generosity. There is yet another difference. Hebrew Andalusian poetry is more often addressed to equals than Arabic poetry. This is due to the fact that the latter was often written for persons of higher standing in the expectation of remuneration. Hebrew poetry, on the contrary, was often used in correspondence between rab­bis, that is persons of equal status, who often were friends. Generosity in Hebrew poetry then does not always refer to material rewards such as money, precious gifts or beautiful slave girls, but could also refer to immaterial goods, such as a poem.

CONCLUSIONS

When dealing with the elegiac genre in world literature, one is struck by the universality of this genre. In other literatures, for instance, Medieval Provençal poetry, one can also find thematic sequences such as 1) invocation to lamentation; 2) praising the deceased one and his lineage; 3) enumeration of countries and persons distressed by his death; 4) praising his virtues; 5) benediction, greeting, or prayer for salvation; and 6) description of distress. This superficial likeness of elegiac themes is not accidental. Behind the poetic experience lies the actual event which was the incentive towards the composition of the poem. In a still

40 To a quite strange category of elegies belongs the one which Yehudah ha-Lewi made for himself (no. 32): it does not belong to the category of praise, because the poet mainly describes how the angel of Death came suddenly to him, without even permitting him to make his own testament or to take leave of his own sons and daughters. Unlike the few Arabic examples of elegies in this genre, there is no self-praise in it. See Ibrahim al-Hawi, Ritha' al-Nafs bayn 'Abd Yagkuth ibn Waqas wo-Malik ibn al-Rayf al-Tamimi, (Beyrouth, Risala 1988); see for Abu Nuwas' elegies on himself, Ewald Wagner, Abu Nuwas, eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen Abbasidenzeit (Wiesbaden, 1965), 359.
unpublished lecture James Montgomery looks for the ties between actual experience and poetic experience, and traces in the poetic sequences the states of mind which, according to psychologists, people in distress go through: such as denial of the event, anger, bargaining with Fate or God, depression and resignation, which are also easy to find as poetic tropoi in the elegies. Nevertheless, however universal the genre may be, it is striking that in Arabic and Hebrew Andalusian elegies themes and motifs are connected with pre-Islamic concepts which have survived for centuries, such as the concept of Fate which we stressed earlier. How universal this elegiac genre may be, in the elaboration of its motifs, the poets still maintained its specific archaic pre-Islamic background. This does not mean that the Hebrew Andalusian elegies are poems without originality and ingenuity and that the Hebrew poets are mere copyists of the Arabic tradition. Every poem and every poet has, although within the tradition, its own individuality and character and own use of the Hebrew Classical language. Within this elegiac tradition he finds the best way to express his feelings about death and mortality. It is as if, before the mysteries of Death and Immortality, with so many insecurities and doubts, the poet wants to cling to something more sure and stable, to old expressions and language which reflect archaic manners and customs. Those expressions have proved themselves during centuries. We, also, people of the twentieth century, express ourselves only by stereotyped ideas, when suddenly confronted with someone's death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Werner Caskel, Das Schicksal in der altorientalischen Poesie, (Leipzig 1926).


Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, Keter 1970) I-XIII.


\[18, 216 (1980), 99-121].

Yehudah ha-Lewi, Diwan, Ed. H.Brody, (Berlin 5664/1904), II.


Samuel ha-Nagid, Ben Ghober, ed. S. Abramson, (Tel Aviv 5713/1953).


Pieter Snoor, see his article in the present collection.


