CHAPTER TWO

LANGUAGE, RHETORIC, PROSODY

In his Judeo-Arabic prose introduction to his collection of liturgical poems (fol. 75a in manuscript NLR Evr. I 802), Moses Darī asks “God the Giver [Arab. al-wahhāb] to give me the discernment to choose the proper meter [Arab. wazn], theme [Arab. ma‘nan] and rhetoric [Arab. khiṭāb], so that the perfection of this section might be to me a source of favor in the eyes of those endowed with intelligence and understanding.” We will review the major thematic elements (Arab. ma‘ānin) in chapter 3. This chapter will focus on poetic form and language and will examine the most important linguistic, prosodic, rhetorical, and structural devices (including wazn indications; section 2.4) in Darī’s liturgical poems on the pārāshōt.2

2.1 Hebrew Language, Style, and Rhetoric

Like his secular poetry, Darī’s liturgical poetry is characterized by biblical language, with a few added rabbinic and medieval features.3 His lexical repertoire ranges from rare biblical words (including Hebrew

---

1 For the original Judeo-Arabic prose introduction, see the edition below. For a discussion of the text, see the introduction to this book and section 1.2. Note that one of the four Hebrew poetical metatexts on fol. 135b in manuscript NLR Evr. I 802, the poem with the incipit: רְאֵה שִׁירִים (“Perceive how these poems”), contains additional hints at issues of language, rhetoric, and prosody: “Perceive how these poems that i composed on God’s Law are cut and carved out of my heart: how i made them with strong contents and sound meters, without irregularities, and from the Scriptures.”

2 We will only take into account the most typical elements of the Hebrew language and style in his liturgical poetry; for more general issues also applicable to Moses Darī’s secular poetry, see chapter 8 on Language and Style (particularly the sections on Hebrew Lexicon, Grammar and Syntax, Style and Rhetoric, Poetical Form and Prosody, and Quotations) in J. Yeshaya, Medieval Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Egypt, 119–35.

3 Cf. J. Yeshaya, Medieval Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Egypt, 119: “Moses Darī’s compositions show a preference for biblical language. Andalusian poets such as Solomon ibn Gabriol, Moses ibn Ezra, and Judah ha-Levi strove to attain the ideal of pure, biblical language. Darī may have found the return to the biblical layer of language plus a purist approach that disqualified post-biblical Hebrew attractive for ideological reasons. Aharon Maman has noted that in poetry and prose, Karaite style tends towards the biblical. However, given that the Bible set the poetical standard for most Jews, the Karaites’ poetical language differed but little from that of the Rabbanites.” Cf. A. Maman, “Karaite Hebrew,” in Karaite Judaism, ed. M. Pollick, 485–503 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
hapax legomena like הרותא "strength" [Ps 22:20], הנַרְגֶּשֶׁה "place of repose" [Isa 28:12], חָשַׁב "interpretation" [Eccl 8:1], שַׂעַר "enjoyment" [Gen 18:12], קִרְס "destruction" [Jer 46:20], and Aramaic words like רֵינ "angel" [Dan 4:10, 14, 20]), to rabbinic words (predominantly formed according to the rabbinic nominal pattern qĕṭīlā, like נִסְע "travelling," though also including verbal forms like מֵעָה נֶזֶה "I said" as well as typical rabbinic terms like לַשׁוֹב "Divine Presence") and medieval pîyyût terms (such as כַּלֶּנִי רְוֵשׁ נְגָה נְמָשֶׁה "the five senses").

Similarly, grammar and syntax in Darʿī’s liturgical poetry is very similar to that in his secular poetry. He intermixes various layers of Hebrew, including Biblical Hebrew (e.g., the use of the infinitive absolute and the infinitive construct with prepositions and pronominal suffixes), Rabbinic Hebrew (e.g., combining the syntactical potential of the verb קִנְי in prefix- or suffix-conjugations with an active or passive participle), and Medieval Hebrew (e.g., regularly employing nifʿal and hitpaʿēl participles and passive puʿal and hofʿal participles). On the whole, this corpus is distinguished by “the relative clarity of Darʿī’s Hebrew and the absence of the linguistic gymnastics, which so often characterizes medieval Hebrew poetry”.4

An important reason for the prevalence of Biblical Hebrew in this corpus is that Darʿī interspersed his liturgical poems with both fragmentary as well as whole quotations from the Hebrew Bible, some verbatim, others with slight modifications. Extensive use of refrains (pizmōnīm) taken from the pārāshōt and strophes terminating with quotations that end with similar words make the use of shibbūṣîm (“intertextual appropriations”) in his liturgical poetry even more wide-ranging than in his secular poetry.5

Darʿī’s use of a range of strategies for incorporating shibbūṣîm from the Bible mirrors that of his Andalusian Rabbanite poetic role-models, particularly Judah ha-Levi. In a recent article Avi Shmidman discussed four strategies in Judah ha-Levi’s intertextual pleas for deliverance.6 These strategies are similar to those Darʿī used for shibbūṣîm in which he intended to highlight more than just the neutral or plain meaning of the biblical words.

---

5 Cf. J. Yeshaya, Medieval Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Egypt, 131–35.
6 According to Shmidman, the original biblical context (including speech situation) of the shibbūṣîm may require a fundamental reinterpretation of the liturgical poems’ message, see A. Shmidman, “Intertextual Supplications in the Liturgical Poetry of Yehudah Halevi,” Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge 38 (2013/14, forthcoming); cf. S. Elizur, Hebrew Poetry in Spain in the Middle Ages [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 2004), 3:349–443.