Promotion: From Spain to its Peripheries, Mid-Twelfth to Early Thirteenth Centuries

The mid-twelfth century marked a crucial turn in the history of Spanish Jewry. In the North, the Christians and Muslims continued to struggle over the Iberian Peninsula, with the former expanding their conquests southwards and bringing (back) many Andalusians—Jews and non-Jews alike—under the Christian regime. In the South, however, a new player entered the arena with the North African Berber Almohads' invasion and takeover of al-Andalus. The consequences of the Almohad invasion as regards Andalusian Jewry were devastating and resulted in the ravaging of entire communities. This process also had significant demographic ramifications: whereas Jews in areas newly re-conquered by Christian forces “entered” Christian Spain without leaving their homes, the Jews of the South were forced to take flight. Some fled North over the Pyrenees, while other headed to North Africa and further eastward. However, the many who stayed in the peninsula migrated northwards, joining their brethren in the Christian old-new domains of Iberia.

As Dan Pagis has argued at length, these socio-political-geographic processes marked the beginning of a new era in Spain’s Hebrew poetry. The Hebrew poets of the new era carried on the poetic tradition of al-Andalus, yet let it be infused with new formal, stylistic and thematic directions. They were also attentive to the neighboring European literatures. In particular, the Hebrew adaptation of the Arabic maqama and maqama-like forms, which had their modest origins in al-Andalus, took on much greater impetus and became a main form.

The Hebrew poets of Christian Spain who were well aware of the changing times and the implications for their poetry often felt their era to be marked by decline. Nevertheless, they considered themselves the clear successors of

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2 Pagis, *Change and Tradition*, pp. 173–244.
3 Especially infamous is Judah Alharizi’s scathing criticism of Hebrew poetry at the turn of the thirteenth century, for example: “Alas, the aftermath of the great age [the Golden Age] was wrath and derision: / Song’s well ran dry, our bards found no godly vision” (*The Book of Taḥkemoni*, Gate 18, p. 180). All translations from *The Book of Taḥkemoni* are David Simha Segal’s, unless otherwise noted.
the Andalusian school. In so doing, they had venerable examples on which to model themselves, such as Moses ibn Ezra and Judah HaLevi, the poets of the early twelfth century, who were periodically active outside of the Andalusian context. A chasm separated the Hebrew poets of Christian Spain from these precursors, however, since starting in the mid-twelfth century al-Andalus was no longer an active center of Hebrew letters, nor a destination for newcomers or even a locus of nostalgic admiration for those who left it, but a desolate relic of an extinct past, its former glory known to later poets by rumor alone.

These later poets departed radically from their predecessors in their attitudes towards Northern Spain. As we have seen, both Moses ibn Ezra and Judah HaLevi—the former exiled to the Christian North in adulthood, the latter born there—stressed Northern Spain’s inferiority to al-Andalus. In fact, both poets apparently reserved the prestigious title of “Sefarad” for al-Andalus alone. For example, when recounting his journey to Granada, the young HaLevi describes himself as having travelled from “Seʾir”; i.e., from the Christian North to “Sefarad,” in other words, al-Andalus.4 Seʾir was just one of the many terms used by the Andalusian poets to refer to the Christian North, whether designating it as the Other (“the East,” “the field of Edom”),5 or more clearly pejoratively (“a wicked place,” “a desert of savages”).6 The Christian North was only apparently described as part of “Sefarad” and accorded the lofty qualities previously reserved for al-Andalus alone, when the Golden Age had come to a close.7 An instructive instance of these new attitudes may be found in an ode to the entire Iberian Peninsula delivered by Judah Alḥarizi’s regular protagonist Ḥever the Kenite:8

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4 See above for an analysis of the young HaLevi’s letter to Moses ibn Ezra (pp. 52–53), and compare with Ibn Ezra’s comments on HaLevi in the poem Yeldei yamim (Moses ibn Ezra: Secular Poems, vol. 1, pp. 22–23, poem no. 17:14).
7 On this issue see also Decter, Iberian Jewish Literature, pp. 5–6.
8 For the Hebrew original, see Yahalom and Katsumata’s Tahkemoni, The Tales, Gate 39 (version 2), p. 450; for the English translation, see Segal’s The Book of Tahkemoni, Gate 46, p. 334. The difference between the gate numbers of the Hebrew version and the English translation, here and in the following examples, has to do with different methods of constructing Tahkemoni. Segal’s translation is modeled on Toporovsky’s 1952 edition of Tahkemoni, whereas Yahalom