

The Judaeo-Muslim Cultural World in Morocco: Written and Spoken

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Jewish thought and the Maghrebian cultural landscape

If, at the outset, we postulate the totality of Jewish thought and lay down the principle of its organic unity and its call to universalism, thus asserting the active solidarity which dominates its relations with Jewish religious and intellectual life in the Maghreb, if we state that both have a privileged interrelationship and use the same modes of expression, then we must add that Maghrebian Judaism is an integral part of the intellectual space, the cultural landscape and the civilization of the Muslim West where it was born, blossomed and bore fruit.

Jewish thought, predominantly religious, essentially sacred in character (but we know the impossibility of separating, in watertight compartments, religious thought from its lived extensions into everyday life), is defined by its traditional modes of expression, habitually transmitted in Hebrew: *halakhah* (codes, Responsa, Taqqanot), Biblical and Talmudic exegesis, Aggadah and preaching (homiletic literature, Jewish legends), liturgical and didactic poetry, theosophy and Kabbalah, philosophy and theology. To this should be added an entire 'oral literature' (or one written down at a later date) which is expressed in local dialects; to a considerable extent this serves as an accessory to the teaching and communication (direct or allusive) of other traditional Rabbinic disciplines; it is also the preferred setting for popular and folkloric manifestations of the religious life.

Importance and function of literatures in dialect

We should note at the very beginning that what is represented in these Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo-Castilian and Judaeo-Berber literatures – but at hierarchized levels of intellectual aspiration, various degrees of elaboration, thought and experience – is the whole of traditional Jewish thought such as we have just defined it, that is to say, the written Rabbinic discourse which constitutes the major intellectual production and the scholarship pertaining to the realm of the sacred and of Hebrew writing; prestige and primacy may actually accrue to the dominant scriptural knowledge expressed in Hebrew.¹

Whatever the case, the kind of intellectual activity represented by these written and oral literatures in Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo-Berber and Judaeo-Castilian occupies a not insignificant place in the cultural landscape of Jewish societies in the Muslim West.

In the ocean of dialect literatures we can distinguish multiple ways of saying corresponding to different functions, types of discourse and works produced for differing

circumstances, various genres and themes, all benefiting – though to different degrees – from a certain predilection in both the educated milieu and among the public at large and the popular masses.

With an essentially Jewish focal point we should remember: the Judaeo-Arabic and Judaeo-Berber translations of the Bible (Judaeo-Castilian in the Spanish-speaking descendants of the *megorahim* 'expelled' from Spain), treatises of the Mishnah (more particularly the Passover Haggadah and *Pirkei Avot*, the Chapters of the Fathers) liturgical compositions; hagiographic pieces glorifying the Palestine saints (Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohay and Rabbi Meir) or the many saints' tombs celebrated by *hillula* and seasonal pilgrimage; panegyrics; the songs and laments which shape the rhythm of family life and mark its joys and its sorrows; entire treatises on *halakhah* (practical law and jurisprudence); the homilectic literature of popular preaching; and satirical and parodic pieces which leave their mark on the folklore of the festival of Purim or the ritual of other solemn ceremonies.

Passing to the lay and secular sphere, that of culture which knows no denominational frontiers, as it were symbiotic, where Jews and Muslims met, shared the same preoccupations and were moved by the same impulses, we find Berber and Arabic poetry, the *qissa* (tale) and the *malhûn*, the ballade and the ritornelle ('*arubi*'), the great compositions in Eastern Arabic, Hispanic or local language, those connected with classical Andalusian music (Hayk's anthology for Morocco, Nathan Yafil for Algeria and *Sfina ma'lûf* for Tunisia), all those, very numerous, inscribed in a *lahan* at the top of compositions of *piyyutim*² and serving as models for the creation of Hebrew poetry itself and for Jewish sacred and secular music, that of the *piyyut* and the popular song. All these forms bear witness to the immense Mediterranean, eastern and Maghrebian culture the bearers of which were the Jewish communities in the big cities and the most remote *mellah*-s of the Atlas and the borders of the Sahara. To all this we must add the marvellous and fascinating world of story and legend, the scholarly or ludic world of proverbs and popular sayings, epistolary literature, minor genres practised equally by Jews and Muslims and much favoured in the society of women and children, more particularly greetings, love-letters and shrewish sayings: enigmas and riddles; word-play and puns; rebukes; occasional songs, generally improvised couplets, humorous and sarcastic; lullabies; swinging songs and those accompanying other games; invocations to God, the angels, Biblical heroes, Palestinian and local saints; and various types of little stories and polemical or political songs composed on the occasion of civil wars or struggles between different invaders.

Scholarly literature and popular literature

Although literature in the Hebrew language generally concerns written knowledge, the élitist scholarship of a lettered society recruited almost exclusively from among men, dialect literature was directed to the whole world, to the population which was barely literate or poorly educated, especially to women and children. For all that, both played a part in the transmission of knowledge, custom and usage, and filled – although at different levels and to different extents – the same initiatory, pedagogic and liturgical functions. The second was, moreover, the faithful custodian of traditions which were not written down. It was a source of information above all else; it possessed, besides, in some

of its lay and secular aspects, a remarkable virtue, that of an integrating and socializing power at the level of the Jewish community on the one hand and of the two confessional groups – Jewish and Muslim – on the other, as a large number of compositions bear witness.

However, it is impossible to escape the impression that there was, as it were, a split between 'written' Hebrew literature and 'oral' dialect literature. Hebrew, the language of the Book and of the Ritual, was used for communicating with God. It was in Judaeo-Arabic and Judaeo-Berber (Judaeo-Spanish *haketiya* in Spanish-speaking societies) that one communicated with people, relatives and neighbours, and dialect literature was the mirror in which one saw oneself; it was the expression of the depths of the soul, of secular and indeed religious occurrences, of daily life, of all sorts of things which it was forbidden or impossible to express in the sacred language.

This dialect literature, like that in the Hebrew language, should also be brought to light, collected and established. In that way a resonant body of written documentation can be assembled that is indispensable for the understanding of a milieu little investigated when there was still time to do so and henceforth condemned to disappear, irrevocably, because of the uprooting and dispersion of the Jewish communities in the Maghreb, particularly those settled for centuries if not for one or two thousand years in the Atlas Mountains and on the edges of the Sahara, carriers of ancient memories and old cultures.³

At the linguistic level, the written and oral documentation used may belong to various dialect registers. It should be recalled that the language of the *qasîda*, representative of a certain level of popular culture, is a literalizing idiom, conservative, characterized by archaisms, a morpho-syntactical substratum and lexical resource that has actually disappeared from current usage, from familiar and everyday speech, and which is scarcely any longer recognized or understood, neither in the Jewish civic milieu, nor in educated Muslim society which itself is raised in the modern school of the classical and literary language disseminated by official teaching, the press, radio and television the language of the *malhûn*. Indeed, little by little the language of the popular story is becoming the province of a tiny number of specialists, university researchers or peripatetic poets and story-tellers.

I must add a few more brief thoughts on the literary genre we are examining, on its relations with tradition and folklore, on the important functions which we know it to have had in the Jewish societies of Morocco. First of all, we should note that dialect literatures are essentially oral. If they are written down at all, it is incidentally and occasionally; they are reproduced from memory, as chance dictates, by Muslim scribes in Arabic characters and by Jewish copyists in Hebrew script.

Oral literature is concerned with folklore, but it also comes under sociology, ethno-anthropology and indeed history. All that has been said and later gathered together by the collective memory belongs to its vast domain. Generally described as 'popular', it is continually enriched by the work of literate individuals which it rapidly assimilates. One can therefore legitimately deduce from this that oral and popular literatures preserve and transmit the creations of historical civilizations, as well as the inheritance of prehistoric cultures. This survival and transmission does, however, conform to certain rules and complies with the functioning of popular mentalities.

The analogous mental structures of the Jewish and Muslim (Arab and Berber) populations have given rise, in the Maghreb, to a literature and a folklore in which the Jewish

cultural substratum and the Arabo-Berber heritage combine together in an original creation. We should note here that the great historical works of oral literature in dialect, and the prophetic chronicles of the Jewish Aggadah and the Muslim *qissas*, belong to the collective memory of the Semitic world which has collected many varied versions and fashioned them out of a written tradition. Examples would be the legendary accounts concerning the life of Joseph, the death of Moses and the adventure of Job that are in circulation in the East and in the Maghreb in the various Ethiopian, Coptic, Arabic, Moorish and Berber dialects.

As for what relates specifically to Judaism, we should state that 'folklore' associates and identifies with 'tradition'; and 'tradition' is what is 'received' and what is 'transmitted', as indicated by the Hebrew terms *qabbalah* ('Kabbalah') and *masoret* and to which the first words of the Chapters of the Fathers give voice: 'Moses received the Law from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua transmitted it to the Ancients', etc. Since its origin, therefore, at the birth of Judaism, a community conscience and collective memory existed, a tradition formed from all the teachings received and transmitted and the continuity of which has been assured, thanks to a chain of transmitter-creators. It is indeed a case of transmitter-creators, for although the message transmitted finds in the traditional works the models which serve as exemplars for its own creation, although it draws its inspiration from a reservoir of thoughts that have already been formulated, it is also constantly reinterpreted, actualized, fertilized and enriched with new perspectives, giving birth to new creations.

This 'folkloric-traditional' element can be assessed and appreciated in the light of its relations with Jewish thought and its various modes of expression, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the importance of the close ties that join it to the cultural and socio-linguistic environment in which it developed.

Scrutiny of the poetic compositions and other documents presented here reveals a virtually boundless power of suggestion, a strongly concentrated thought, an accumulation of emotions, a network packed with references and with formulae aiming at the highest possible distillation of meaning, of connotations referring beyond the frontiers of the text, to a very allusive symbolic and allegorical universe, to literary traditions and cultural landscapes which it is a delight to discover – and my work precisely concerns research on the traditional substratum, and the collation and interpretation of the sources. Each work of this interiorized culture is an echo replying directly or allusively to a call, to a need to speak and to express oneself. Moreover, we can see there the care taken in adapting the exotic, sometimes mythical, element of the Maghrebian landscape and the traditions of the surrounding space, the concern with initiating, as it were, its ethnicization, with integrating a strange event and a strange character in a local universe in such a way as to make history more familiar. Thus it happens in our Judaeo-Arabic pieces from Morocco that exemplary Biblical heroes or Palestinian saints or miracle-workers (the Mordecai of our *Mi-Kamoha*, the Job of our historical chronicle, the *Bar-Yohay* of our *qissa* of Tinghir, and so on), the iconography of the Passover Haggadah (the simple Hebrew verb form *shefok*⁴ becomes, in popular imagination, now a legendary old holy man, now a demoniacal figure). The very traditions of the Bible are an autochthonous vision of the sacred scriptural texts, a personal way of reading, conceiving and interpreting them, integrated as they are in the framework of 'lived' life, the linguistic and socio-confessional environment, a specified geo-political area.

Ethnicization, 'mythicization' and actualization of the historical phenomenon as well as of the discourse (and the text) which convey them are the three pole concepts which govern this literature.

All the surviving texts tell a story in their own way. The predominantly religious character which we have seen to hold great sway over the entire corpus of Hebrew poetry, emerges here in genres of a pedagogic and didactic character developed as Biblical and Talmudic aids to teaching in school, which is continued by that of the adults through preaching and by ethical and homiletic literature; it culminates in liturgical pieces. The interest brought to events as human history is quite remarkable: besides the so-called 'historical' pieces, laudatory and hagiographical compositions and – more clearly still – laments have their origin in a certain historicity. But historical reality is not slow to be transformed by collective memory; metamorphosed by popular imagination, it emerges after a certain period in the categories of myth and legend. With confusion over periods and dates, it is chronology which first pays the price of this mythicization. Like other compositions, our 'History of Job' pulsates with anachronisms. Our Biblical hero has been made a contemporary of the patriarchs, a councillor at Pharaoh's court at the time of Moses; he knew the age of David, of the Queen of Sheba, or even that of Ahasuerus; he returned with the hotheads from Babylon and founded an academy at Tiberias . . .

It sometimes happens that one catches the very moment of the mutation of event into legend. Witness this little tale told me some years ago by a visionary painter, Joseph Manor, a Jew from Iraq living in Paris. 'His grandfather', he said, 'had overcome the demon Lilith who had been responsible for the death of Jewish boys at Baghdad, he snatched away her deadly sword which he entrusted to the family where it is still guarded with great care.' According to the speaker, his grandfather, a master of practical Kabbalah (a science verging on magic), frequently performed miraculous cures. The original history, based on the real and tragic fate of new-born Jewish boys in Baghdad, was less important to our informer than the myth which it had produced. The historical memory was disappearing, living legend replaced history.

All literary production, even 'folkloric' literature which seems to aim only at entertaining and amusing (the parodic pieces of Purim, for example) carries on with the instruction of its audience and takes part in its initiation. The initiatory function is in fact essential. We need do no more than call to mind the scenario of the child betrothals of the *kuttab*⁵ and the solemn and serious ceremonial of the bar mitzvah (*bar-miswah*), a rite of passage of which the most important element is the 'sermon' which proclaims that the adolescent is in fact promoted to religious majority.

It also happens, and more frequently than is believed, that literary Jewish works in dialect leave the realm of the sacred to concentrate on other genres and themes, less focused on religion and liturgy, and dependent on a popular literature common to Jewish and Muslim societies in which nothing can be discerned which recalls their confessional or ethnic origin. The situation is similar with the poetic genres represented by the *qasida* of 'the Lover', the ballade dedicated to the 'Caftan', and the numerous compositions evoked in the 'Arab models for Hebrew poetry and Jewish music' which I have recorded. There, as in the vast domain of story and legend, popular song and classical music from the Andalusian inheritance, Jew and Muslim meet again to entertain themselves, exalt love, wine and the joys of the flesh, to sing of women's finery, bewail the grief of separation and the sorrow of unhappy lovers, and so on, using the same language and the same

discourse, the same symbols and mythical representations, the same mythical structures, the same techniques of the poetical art of the *malhûn*, the same aesthetic, the same motives and the same themes. This literature is as it were the locus of privileged encounter for two groups which, in this specific domain of culture, achieve a veritable symbiosis.

If, in the Golden Age of the Muslim West, this symbiosis occurred at the level of written learning, of the *adab*⁶ (the humanities and the natural sciences), the Jews then rivalling the Muslims in the areas of philosophy, grammar, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and so on, after the Arab and Jewish exile from Spain during the period of so-called 'Decadence' and withdrawal, the two societies continued on the hospitable Maghrebian soil to meet at the level of folklore and its many manifestations, of popular beliefs, oral knowledge and intellectual production in dialect. It is in this genre of literature that one sees the permeability of confessional and socio-cultural boundaries: by this means there was easy communication between the popular masses and the cross-fertilization of their folklores. Dialogue between cultures replaced confrontation between 'national' ideologies and religious consciences. The two societies certainly lived differently, jealous of their identity and intransigent concerning their faith and their beliefs; but they joined together again in an identical form of expression of thought, in the fusion of mentalities, indeed the *rapprochement* of hearts and, when all is said and done, peaceable coexistence.

The production of literary works in dialect is the locus of a compromise, the space of a convergence in which an original and authentic socio-cultural identity is developed. It has marked Judaeo-Maghrebian society with its indelible imprint; this to such an extent and so effectively that its echo still resounds in the uprooted soul of emigrés settled in Israel and elsewhere, retained in their music and songs, their folklore and ritual, their homesickness, their melancholy regrets, their bitter or nostalgic cries and their writings, violent or discreet. It is expressed more subtly in Hebrew literary works – still very limited – of some Maghrebian authors in Israel, and more particularly in the sensibility of young poets (Erez Bitton, Gabriel Bensimhon) whose message conveys quite remarkably the soul sad at heart, the culture hidden or humiliated and the hard and difficult conditions of existence of a 'second' diaspora of which, on Moroccan soil, they had known only the bewitching face, the affective warmth, the joys and the sorrows.⁷

SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS

1. *The privileged role of the qissa*

In the mode of expression which these literatures comprise, particularly that belonging to the Judaeo-Arabic linguistic field, the *qissa* (story or rhymed narrative), drawing its prestige from the poetic ornamentation and *signum*, derives some advantages from a certain predilection for it among the educated milieu as well as among the public at large and the popular masses. Its themes and genres are very varied: adapted rhymed versions of Biblical stories or liturgical poems, songs of joy or lamentation, panegyrics, hagiographic pieces glorifying the Palestinian saints or local saints' tombs that are celebrated by the *hillula* and seasonal pilgrimages, homilies or satirical compositions. The folkloric songs which shape family ceremonies, joys and sorrows, are a genre without literary or intellectual pretensions; they are composed in a language which lends itself more to local living

forms of speech, while the *qissa* is more carefully finished in form and expression. Also part of this literature are all the oral translations of the Bible, Mishnaic and liturgical texts, as well as poems in Hispanic Arabic associated with classical or Andalusian music, gathered together in the collection known as the *Al-Hayk*.⁸

Besides the landscape of folklore which it describes and the precious linguistic materials it represents, this oral Judaeo-Arabic and Judaeo-Berber documentation reveals, on examination, a content which ties it to a Maghrebian cultural grouping on the one hand and to universal Jewish thought on the other. A rigorous and minute analysis of the written text or the oral discourse, of their direct and allusive references, illuminates their literary foundations and an immensely rich cultural substratum.

2. Juridical science and folklore

In juridical literature, that of the *Tagganot* and the *Responsa* ('Rabbinic Ordinances and Juridical Consultations'), the texts richest in information of all kinds which are as valuable for the lawyer as for the ethnologist or the linguist, are the regulations or sumptuary laws which lay down restrictions on expenses on the occasion of family celebrations, forbidding too the wearing of certain jewels and the display of precious ornaments . . . Drawn up in Arabic and Castilian more often than in Hebrew, these legislative measures were read publicly in the synagogues or in the public squares, so that everybody, men and women, grasped their meaning . . . Dating from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these texts contain an infinite number of as-yet-unedited details – on costume, women's ornaments and their jewels, the kitchen and the ceremony of meals, the customs, usages and rites which accompanied family celebrations, particularly circumcision, religious majority and marriage. It is, in sum, the mirror in which the community looked at itself, a historical and linguistic source of considerable importance. Some *Tagganot* have the same documentary value, also drawn up in Arabic and Castilian, which concern the personal status of the woman; the rights of wife and mother are expressly laid down and, as a result of this fact, she was directly informed about this.⁹

The local dialect languages are thus the accessories of oral transmission, information and knowledge, a pedagogic tool destined to communicate rabbinical learning in Hebrew, to popularize it, as it were, and to put it within reach of the majority of men, women and children. Also bearing witness to it are the oral translations of the Bible, gnomic literature and the extremely rich and fruitful literature of proverbs and hagiographic narratives, chronicles, memoirs and annals of the genre published in *Textes historiques judeo-marocains*, edited by G. Vajda in 1951 (*Hesperis*, 12), liturgical pieces like the Passover Haggadah or other elements of ritual, the public teaching of adults and women through the intermediary of the *drashah*, 'preaching' on the Sabbath, feast-days and special points in the Jewish calendar, which makes use of traditional homiletic literature, the Midrash and Aggadah, the world of Jewish legend and the imaginary and folkloric world of local mythology.

From juridical thought and so-called 'didactic' literary genres which we have done no more than mention here, let us pass on to the sphere of poetry, one of the most fertile modes of expression of popular learning and culture and of oral and dialect literature in Maghrebian Judaism.

3. *Bilingual pieces – ‘Al-Matrûz’*

I will only say a few words about the poetic genre known as *matrûz*. In these bilingual pieces, where a stanza or line in Hebrew alternates with one that follows in Arabic, conceived especially for song and music, there appears too the Maghrebian Jew's fidelity to the poetic inheritance, bequeathed from the Golden Age, and the link with Andalusian song. This can be observed in the mechanisms by which the Hebrew text is substituted for, or placed next to, the Arab text, the first conforming to the prosodic laws of the second, yielding to the demands of its metrics and respecting it to the extent of the location of placing of a vocalized final consonant before an initial vowel (*yala-lan*) or of 'nanization' (*na-na-na*). The two versions agree perfectly, the melodic lines are exactly superimposed. Here are perfect morphological and syntactic resemblances and rigorous correspondence between the melodic lines. But at the thematic level, the texts do not correspond in the least: the Jewish poet is preoccupied with the faith, the liturgy, the practice of legal prescriptions, Messianic hopes . . . while the Arabic compositions, which he adapts or imitates, are secular in nature, communicating the commonplaces of laudatory, erotic or bacchic poetry. From time to time the Jewish poet inserts stanzas, or stiches-in Arabic dialect into the web of Hebrew compositions in traditional style. This juxtaposition, the passage from one language to another, is the cultural and linguistic reality of the Jewish Maghreb. 'But this web of language, this skilful gradation, also has aesthetic value; it cannot but recall the art of tapestry'¹⁰ or, rather, of 'embroidery', as is indicated by the very name of this kind of poetry, signified by the term *matrûz* ('embroidered piece'). This very technique, this genre of linguistic mixtures or cocktails, is also to be found in popular Jewish Castilian songs of the Spanish-speaking communities of northern Morocco and the former Ottoman Empire.¹¹ Turkish, Arabic, Greek and Hebrew expressions are all skilfully set in the Castilian web. Abundant modern Greek folklore is also familiar with examples of this 'mosaic', this 'collage' not without nostalgia, nor indeed aesthetic emotion . . . By means of this process the authors secured an expansion of the musical and semantic field (compare the Hebrew and Arabic expressions in the *matrûz*). It is not in practice always a question of straightforward translations, but echogames and subtle correspondences.¹²

We should also note that the influence of the milieu is not here uniquely linguistic; it comes from the sphere of sensibility and of culture; it has a dimension which goes beyond the processes and tricks of language, the conventions and techniques of poetic composition.

[Here is an example of *Matrûz* (taken from my work, *Poésie juive en Occident Musulman*, pp. 295–296).]

The fidelity of the Moroccan Jew to Andalusian song is apparent in the mechanisms for substitution of the Hebrew text for the original Arabic text, the first conforming to the prosodic laws of the second, accommodating to the demands of its metrics and respecting it as far as the placing of vocalized final consonants before initial vowels (*yala-lan*) and 'nanization' (*na-na-na*). The two musical versions agree perfectly, the melodic lines are exactly superimposed. But at the thematic level, the texts do not correspond: the Jewish poet is preoccupied with the faith, the liturgy, the practice of legal prescriptions, Messianic hopes . . . while the Arabic compositions, which he adapts or imitates, are secular in nature, communicating the commonplaces of laudatory, erotic or bacchic poetry.

Bilingual poetry or *matrûz* illustrates well this kind of adaptation, or marriage, pushed to its limit, where Hebrew and Arabic lines or stiches are seen to intertwine, in the same metre, musical mode and melody. The bilingual poem of which the first stanza is reproduced below illustrates this kind of adaptation well. The intertwining Hebrew and Arabic stiches in the same isosyllabic metre can be seen there. In the first stiches, the poet extols the greatness of his God, deplores the wanderings of his soul; the second evoke, allusively in this first stanza but more openly in those that follow, passionate love and separation from the one that is loved.

(Hebrew)	יגדל שם האל בפי כל היצור	1
(Arabic)	סאר קלבי ולאייס ענרי לימן נאמור	2
(Hebrew)	יחידמי לא מצאה לה קן־דרור	3
(Arabic)	קר(ר)בתי נפשי ולאייס תטיק תחמאל	4
(Arabic)	כיף נגפל קלבי נאחוסו יתפתאל	5
	سار قلبي و ليس عندي لمن نامور	2
	قربتي نفسي و ليس تطيق تحمال	4
	كيف نغفل قلبي نحس يتفتل	5

1. May God's name be exalted in the mouth of every creature.
2. My heart has gone away and I no longer have anyone to whom I can speak.
3. My soul has scarcely found shelter, not even a swallow's nest.
4. You have come nearer, my soul, but you by no means have the strength to carry the burden.
5. My heart is scarcely unaware of what I feel twist in my breast.

4. *Popular poetry. Two original Juaeo-Muslim pieces: 'Al-Mahbûb' ('The Lover') and 'Al-Qaftân' ('The Caftan')*

Although the piece about the *Caftan* is characterized by some rare Jewish Hispanisms, the composition dedicated to the distant *Lover*, the theme of separation and the absence of the messenger, is not itself distinguished by any of the features commonly observed in the language of the Jews of Morocco. This *qasîda*, like a fair part of the secular poetry of the *malhûn*, follows the example of numerous erotic and bacchic pieces and is interpreted metaphorically as an allegory referring to the Prophet Muhammed.

Let us pause a moment over the second composition, that devoted principally to the caftan. It is a kind of *ballade-ritornelle* belonging to the great Mahgrebbian poetic genre called *'arûbi*, a composition from the viewpoint of a woman which habitually extols love and passion. In the past the citizens sang the *'arûbi* in the great springtime outings in the gardens and the countryside. The central theme of this ballade is the caftan, its varieties and colours, its symbolism and mythology. We should remember that the colour,

These two compositions come from a Jewish cultural collection. (see 'Popular poetry: two original Judaeo-Muslim pieces', extracted from Haïm Zafrani *Littératures dialectales et populaires juives en Occident musulman*, (Paris, 1980) pp. 222–238.

the richness of fabrics and the decoration varied with the seasons, the style and the destination of the caftan. The whole constituted an allusive world – indeed one that was symbolic and allegorical – where things could be called ‘Let me adore you’, ‘Snow on the mountain’, ‘Beard of My Lord Muhammad’, ‘O sweet pigeon’, ‘The feet of the cuckold on the ladder’, ‘The axe in the mother-in-law’s head’ and so on.

The caftan is a traditional piece of the masculine wardrobe. But it is more especially women’s finery. In brocaded silk, embellished with gold thread, velvet and brocade set off with silver and gold braid, it is sumptuous and superb; of a fine cloth decorated with multi-coloured filigrée work, it is more modest and plainer. It is always the garment of pomp and ceremony, of great public receptions or intimate meetings. It constitutes the finery of the young girl, the newly married and the established wife, the lover and his love. Virtue and vice, it is said, dwell in its vast folds and its cloth of gold and brocade. Buckled with a thousand and one buttons woven from silk thread, it is the rampart of chastity, the guardian of modesty and of sworn fidelity. Negligently half-open, it seduces, inflames the passionate and delighted heart of the lover intoxicated by the giddiness of eager desire.

Al-Mahbûb (‘The Lover’)

Stanza 1

1. I found nothing more to say when my companion left me.
2. My whole being is weighed down with torpor and my tongue has grown heavy.
Lord! Lord!
3. The nerves of my body have gone slack.
4. And my eyes are drenched with tears.
5. Scarcely did he touch me with his ardour than I was marked with a searing burn.
6. He greeted me, and I set about sweeping the places where he usually sat.
7. Seeing me light-hearted and carefree, he closed his eyes and said to me:
8. ‘I am separated from you O Lord, after you abandoned me to my own fate.’
9. It was thus that he possessed me; my spirit grew inflamed and he went away.
Refrain
10. Could I but see the image of my love in the shining orb of the full moon!
11. How beautiful is each feature of his likeness, the shape of his face and the line of his silhouette.

Al-qaftân (‘The Caftan’)

Prelude and refrain

Take me away, teach me the lute!
Boy! Teach me the lute!
So that the lover’s glass will be pleasing to me!

Stanza I

The doves of the winds
Have taken wing and flown away

Towards the Salt Lake in search of cool waves.
The unmarried young men (too) are busy bathing . . . Take me away . . .

Stanza II

Dove of love
You mad little creature!
Flowers are at the window
Roses in the ewer,
And the betrothed are busy bathing . . . Take me away . . .

Stanza III

A violet caftan
My love will wear
And come to my house
Fifteen days (he will stay there) . . . Take me away . . .

Stanza IV

A striped caftan
My neighbour will wear
And come to my house
Fifteen days (he will stay there) . . . Take me away . . .

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(translated from the French by Juliet Vale)

Notes

1. Various questions can, besides, be asked at a more general level, in connection with the relations between oral knowledge and scriptural knowledge, culture and oral literature, ritual and oral literature, and so on. This is neither the occasion nor the place to consider them. Note, in passing, my comments in *Poésie juive en Occident musulman* (Paris, 1977), on the intellectual itinerary of the educated poet and the oral transmission of knowledge (pp. 98–100), recalling the interdict (taboo) which affected writing, principally concerning the oral Law, the Aggadah, the *targumim* (Aramaic paraphrases of the Bible), or even the liturgy, as evidenced by a large number of Talmudic texts: 'Whoever commits the *halakot* to writing is comparable to the man who throws the Torah into the flames' (*Temurah* 14b, *Gittin* 60b); 'Those who set in writing the Aggadah, "the Jewish legend", have no part in the future world' (Talmud of Jerusalem, *Shabbat* XVI, 1) and so on.
2. *Lahan* (Hebrew) or *lahn* (Arabic) means song, melody, prosodic and musical model; it is sometimes replaced by the Hebrew *no'am* ('melody'), and *peles* ('measure'). (*Piyyut* [plural, *piyyutim*] refers to a poem, especially a liturgical poem inserted in a statutory prayer.)
3. For these communities, see my work, *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc* (new Moroccan ed., *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, Paris, 1983). Here are some historical details: The Jews were the first non-Berber peoples to settle in the Maghreb and they continue to live there to the present-day . . . My researches into the Berber-speaking Jewish milieu have confirmed my theory of the Judaization of the Berber tribes at the beginning of our era . . . The Jews of the Maghreb, like all those of the land of Islam, experienced the condition of *dhimmi*, a condition that was admittedly often precarious but with juridical status and, all in all, liberal (with a very marked degree of judicial, administrative and cultural autonomy).

Their misfortunes increased with the advance of the *Reconquista*; the backwards ebb of the Spanish Jews towards the lands of the Maghreb which their ancestors had left some centuries earlier began well before the Edicts of 1391. The Portuguese and Spanish 'Expelled' of 1492 and 1497 arrived in successive waves and settled, either temporarily or permanently, in the land of the Berbers [Berberie], bringing with them their old Castilian language, their scholarship, their community institutions set down in their Tagganot (Rabbinic ordinances), their usages and customs, and their spirit of enterprise, which made them, faced with the autochthonous population, a socio-culturally dominant group from which the intellectual élite and the bourgeoisie of 'notables' was recruited.

After the creation of the state of Israel (1948) and the advent of independence in countries of the Maghreb, the massive emigration of entire communities was witnessed, the majority to Israel, but also to France, Spain, Canada and elsewhere. With the dislocation and dispersion of these societies a whole system of old structures, with rich and original linguistic and cultural traditions, disappeared. In 1948 there were 268,000 Jews in Morocco. In 1987 only 18,000 remained. The population decline continues, with a perceptible increase in departure rates among young people in particular, who go elsewhere for post-secondary education and hardly ever return to the country.

4. *Shefok (h)* or the mutation of a verb form into a legendary figure. It is the word with which the second part of the liturgy of the Eve of the Passover (*Pesah*) starts. See my work, *Littératures dialectales et populaires juives en Occident musulman*, pp. 386–387: 'Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place.' (Psalm 79: 6–7). These two verses, to which some communities add Psalm 79: 25, Lamentations 3: 66 and various others, serve as an introduction to the second part of Hallel, recited after the meal and beginning with, 'Not unto us, O Lord . . .'. This passage, which has been described as a cry of anger against the accusation of ritual murder, is, according to certain commentators (see the edition of Wilna, 1892), a projection into the messianic era and the disturbed period (the wars of Gog and Magog) which will precede the coming of the Messiah; the wrath of God is thus called down in anticipation on his enemies and on those of the Messiah-Redeemer.

Practices: while this passage is being recited, the house door is customarily left open to allow the prophet Elijah to enter (or to see that no child's body has been left, the material proof of ritual murder of which Jews living in Christian communities during the Middle Ages were accused).

5. See my *Pédagogique juive en terre islam*, p. 36. The initiatory ritual of *kuttab* simultaneously marks the 'betrothal' of a five-year-old child with the girl destined for him by his parents and whom he must later marry, and his 'nuptials', his union with the Torah, for the ceremony takes place on the first day of the festival of Shavu'ot which commemorates the revelation of Sinai and the 'gift of the Law', and is accompanied by a first initiation into the Hebrew alphabet.
6. *Adab* (Arabic) originally signified the practice of politeness, etiquette, socially elevated conventions, the exercise of an ethic and social know-how. This term has evolved towards a more specialized meaning in the study of the classic humanities and great works of literature, suggesting a refined spirit or elegance of style . . . Treatises concerning *adab* began to be composed in the eleventh century.
7. Two very significant and highly representative titles effectively convey this profound nostalgia for the country:
 - a) that of a mystery drama in three acts, entitled *The Messiah, or Requiem for a Moroccan king*, by Gabriel Bensimhon, a writer for the theatre and the cinema who was born at Sefrou, Morocco (the original Hebrew edition won the University of Tel Aviv prize for 1978; there is also a French version).
 - b) that of a collection of poems, entitled *sefer ha-ha' na'* ('The Book of Mint'), the work of the poet Erez Bitton, also from Morocco, published at Tel Aviv in 1979.
8. See Haim Zafrani, *Poésie juive en Occident musulman*, pp. 286, 288, 296, 297.
9. See Haim Zafrani. (1973). *Les Juifs du Maroc, vie sociale, économique et religieuse, Études de Taqqanot et Responsa*. Paris, pp. 223–228 and *passim*.
10. See also for Franco-Arabic bilingualism François Desplanques. (1976). Traditions populaires et création littéraire dans la poésie de Bachir Hadj-Ali. *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 22, pp. 37–46.
11. Songs recorded by Gloria Lévy on a disk entitled 'Sephardic Folk-Songs', accompanied by notes made by Professor M.J. Bernadete.
12. See François Desplanques, *op. cit.*