# The Genre of the *Maqama* in Hebrew Literature:
# Evolution and Style

Abd- al Rahman Mar'i

## Abstract

The age of Muslim Spain was one of the most significant periods in the history of Hebrew literature since its beginnings. At a time when Hebrew no longer served for everyday speech it became the common language of poets. This change did not occur in a vacuum; it was the product of the influence of Arabic language and culture. Hebrew poetry copied the patterns of Arabic poetry in the Arab East and in al-Andalus, giving rise to genres previously unknown in Hebrew literature, such as the *maqama* and the *muwashshat*. The same is true of the motifs, maxims and proverbs, which at first were newcomers to the Jewish world but which in a short time were transmuted into integral elements of Jewish culture on Andalusian territory.

In this study we shall examine one aspect of these influences, namely the evolution of the genre of the *maqama* in Hebrew literature, from its birth to this day in al-Andalus, Europe, the Middle East and Israel after the establishment of the State in 1948, and shed light on it most important sources, practitioners and styles.

The of the *maqama* spread far and wide, and has occupied the attention of scholars every since al-Hamdhānī and al-Ḥarīrī delineated its foundations and structure. Comparative studies have shown the influence with the Arabic *maqama* had on Spanish[1] and Italian literature, especially on picaresque stories[2]

---

[1] See: Ari, Schippers. Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition - Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry, Leiden, 1994.

[2] Hilāl Ghanīmī, *al-Adab al-muqārin* (*Comparative Literature*), 5th printing, Dār al-ʿawda, Beirut, 1962, p. 228; Jareer, Abu Haider."Maqamat Literature and the Picaresque Novel", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 5 (1974), pp 1-10.

and the *maqama*t of chivalry, in particular those of the *qāḍī* Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Balkhī.[1] Other comparative studies have shown the effect that the *maqama* has had on the emergence of Arabic narrative fiction in modern times.[2] However, the scholars who dealt with these aspects paid no attention to the effect that this genre had on Hebrew literature. In fact, Hebrew *maqama*s have not been the subject of any independent studies in Arabic, in which their artistic roots and the elements of their constitution were described. Most such studies have restricted themselves to brief comments on the Hebrew influences in Arabic *maqama*t, and the mention of some names of Hebrew writers. The information in these studies is often erroneous and inexact. Thus, for example, Ḥasan ʿAbbās states[3] that "Sulaymān b. Ṣaqbāl al-Qurṭubī", a contemporary of al-Ḥarīrī, wrote some Hebrew *maqama*s in the manner of al-Ḥarīrī, under the title of *Taḥkemoni*. He adds, however, that Yehuda Ben Shlomo Al-Harizi

---

[1] See: Amīn ʿAbd al-Majīd Badawī. *al-Qiṣṣa fī al-adab al-fārisī* (*The Story in Persian Literature*), Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1964, pp. 364-368; Sabah Mahdi, *Athar al-maqamat al-arabiya fī al-adab al-fārisī* (*The Influence of Arabic Maqamat on Persian Literature*), Majalat Adab al-basra, vol 49 (2009), pp. 31- 49.

[2] See: Muḥammad Yūsuf Najm. *al-Qiṣṣa fī al-adab al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth* (*The Short Story in Modern Arabic Literature*). Beirut: Dār al-thaqāfa, 1996; Anīs al-Maqdisī. *Taṭawwur al-asālīb al-nathriyya fī al-adab al-ʿarabī* (*Evolution of Prose Style in Arabic Literature*), 4th printing, Beirut: Dār al-ʿilm lil-malāyīn, 1968; ʿAbbās Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāliḥī. *Fann al-maqama bayna al-aṣāla al-ʿarabiyya wal-taṭawwur al-qiṣaṣī* (*The Art of the Maqāma: Between Arabic Origins and Narrative Development*) (The Little Encyclopedia). No. 147, Baghdad: Dār al-ḥurriyya lil-ṭibāʿa, 1984.

[3] Ḥasan ʿAbbās. *Fann al-maqāma fī al-qarn al-sādis* (*The Art of the Maqama in the Sixth Century*). Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1986, p. 66; Ibrahim, Geries, A Literary and Gastronomical *Conceit -The Boasting Debate between Rice and Pomegranate Seeds - Mufākharat al-ruzz wa-ḥabb rummān or al-maqāma al-ṣimāṭiyya*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag (Codices Arabici Antiqui VII), 2002.

translated al-Ḥarīrī's *maqama*t into Hebrew, and composed a *maqama*-like collection of poems at the beginning of the seventh century AH which he entitled *Taḥkemoni*; however, the protagonist of these poems was more akin to al-Surūjī than to his predecessor.[1] He clearly contradicts himself here, for how could two different people compose the same book?

Similarly, Muṣṭafā al-Shakʿa[2] informs us that "Yehuda Al-Harizi translated al-Ḥarīrī's *maqama*t into Hebrew, and in the same style he composed fifty *maqama*s of his own, which he entitled *Taḥkemoni*". However, he then ends with the following rather surprising query: "However, we do not know whether this art was fated to go on living in Hebrew literature or whether it ended with the attempt of Shlomo Al-Harizi".

Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, the editor of al-Sharīshī's commentary on al-Ḥarīrī's *maqama*t, says:[3] "In Spain the Jewish poet Yuray Al-Harizi translated these *maqama*t into Hebrew. This translation was published in London in 1872". Here the author clearly errs with respect to Al-Harizi's first name.

---

[1] In his preceding comments ʿAbbās relied on Samīr al-Qalmāwī's and Maḥmūd ʿAlī al-Makkī's *Athar al-ʿarab wal-islām fī al-nahḍa al-ūrubbiyya* (*The Effect of the Arabs and Islam on the European Renaissance*). Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-miṣriyya lil-kitāb, 1970, p. 89.

[2] Muṣṭafā al-Shakʿa. *Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamdhānī, rāʾid al-qiṣṣa al-ʿarabiyya wal-maqāla al-ṣuḥufiyya* (*Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamdhānī, Pioneer of the Arabic Story and Newspaper Article*), 1st printing, Beirut: Dār al-qalam, 1971, p. 749.

[3] Aḥmad al-Sharīshī. *Sharḥ maqamat al-Ḥarīrī li-Abī al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin al-Qaysī al-Sharīshī* (*Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin al-Qaysī al-Sharīshī's Commentary ofn al-Ḥarīrī's Maqamat*), edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, in five parts, Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿaṣriyya, 1998, p. 12.

Tharwat ʿAkkāsha[1] states that "The Jews of al-Andalus also became enamored of the art of the *maqama*. Sulaymān b. Ḥaqbāl al-Qurṭubī, a poet with humorous tendencies who lived at the beginning of the twelfth century CE, composed Hebrew *maqama*s on the model of those of al-Baṣra".[2] Here there are two errors; one is the poet's name, which is Ṣaqbāl and not Ḥaqbāl, and the other is the name of the model, which is al-Ḥarīrī and not al-Baṣra. And in fact, Ibn Ṣaqbāl was influenced by only one of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqama*t (the twentieth, as will be shown below).

In what follows we shall describe the historical and literary stages through which the *maqama* passed in Hebrew literature, in order to clarify the importance of this genre and the educational and ethical motifs with which it dealt, and to show the extent to which the Hebrew *maqama* was influenced by its Arabic counterpart in form, style and protagonists.

At first we should note that the *maqama* emerged as a genre of Hebrew literature since the establishment of Jewish culture in al-Andalus. It was indeed

---

[1] Tharwat ʿAkkāsha. *Fann al-Wāsiṭī min khilāl maqamat al-Ḥarīrī: Athar islāmī muṣawwar* (*The Art of al-Wāsiṭī through al-Ḥarīrī's Maqamat: An Illustrated Islamic Site*). Cairo: Dār al-shurūq, 1992, p. 10.

[2] The Hebrew *maqama* is mentioned in two other studies: "Whatever elements of imitation there may have been in *maqama*s, some did possess local color and influenced the literature of the Jews of Spain" (Iḥsān ʿAbbās. *Tārīkh al-adab al-andalusī: ʿaṣr al-siyāda* [*History of Andalusian Literature: The Age of Supremacy*]. Beirut: Dār al-thaqāfa, 1973, p. 326); "Al-Ḥarīrī's *maqama*t reached al-Andalus at an early time … The Jews and the Christians undertook to translate some of them into their languages at different times. Ibn Shlomo Alḥarizi translated them into Hebrew and also wrote fifty *maqama*t like them in Hebrew" (Yūsuf Nūr ʿAwaḍ. *Fann al-maqamat bayna al-mashriq wal-maghrib* (*The Art of the Maqāma between the Muslim East and West*). Mecca: Maktab al-ṭālib al-jāmiʿi, 1986, p. 246).

one of the most fertile and widespread genres, in addition to traditional poetry, that was written in Hebrew, in contrast to other prose works, on religion, philosophy, philology and literary criticism, that were written in Judeo-Arabic (that is, in Arabic, using Hebrew letters). The Hebrew *maqama*s provide a living depiction of Jewish culture at the time. They enable us to see the Jews in their homes and gatherings, in the market, the hostel and the synagogue, even in their literary salons and the lectures of their preachers.

## The developmental stages of the Hebrew *maqama*

The art of writing *maqama*s entered Hebrew literature in the Andalusian period. Since that time it has gradually expanded to our own days. The emergence and evolution of the genre can be divided into five historical periods,[1] as follows:

1. *Early innovators*: The first person to have composed a *maqama*[2] in Hebrew was Shlomo Ben Ṣaqbal (his Arabic name: Abū Ayyūb b. Sahl). His "Neʾum Asher Ben Yehuda" ("The Speech of Asher Ben Yehuda") tells the story of a young man who comes back to his home town after a long journey. On his way he happens to pass by a castle in which a girl lives, but when he goes there he suddenly sees a man clothed in the figure of a woman.[3] The second was Yosef

---

[1] See: Shlomo Shabban. "The Maqama: Essays and Studies" (in Hebrew); Dan Almagor. "The Maqama" (in Hebrew), *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*; Abd al-Raḥman Marʿī, *The Influence of al-Hariri's Maqamat on Tahkemoni's Mehberot* (in Hebrew), Ph.D. thesis, Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1995, pp. 6-19; Ari, Schippers. "Some Remarks about the Hebrew Maqama and Non- Classical Arabic Literature", Criticism and Interpretation, 39 (2006), pp. v- xviii.

[2] In Hebrew the genre is denoted either by the Arabic word *maqama* or by the Hebrew word *maḥberet*, plural *maḥbarot*, a neologism invented by Yehuda Al-Harizi.

[3] See: Yehudit Dishon. "Neum Asher ben Juda by Shlomo ibn Saqbal and the Twentieth Maqama in Judah Alharizi's Tahkemoni". *Bikoret u-Farshanut* (*Criticism and Interpretation*) 6, 1974, pp. 57-65.

Ben Zabara, who wrote *Sefer Shaʻshuʻim* (*The Book of Delight*),[1] a collection of fifteen stories taken from Jewish lore and Hebrew literature. The stories are constructed on the model of *The Arabian Nights*, that is, they are connected by means of a narrative framework with which the book opens.[2] The third writer was Yehuda Ibn Shabbetai (1168-after 1225), who wrote the *maqama* "Minḥat Yehuda" ("Judah's Offering").[3] In this *maqama* the author criticizes women and quotes passages from the Old Testament as well as Arab proverbs for the reader's edification. He was therefore called *sone nashim* 0028"hater of women").[4] This *maqama* has Arabic roots and clearly influenced Yehuda Al-Harizi's *maqama* "Marriage".[5]

Ibn Shabbetai composed two additional *maqama*s as well, "ha-Milḥama beyn ha-ḥokhma we-ha-ʻosher" ("The War Between Wisdom and Wealth"), a debate between reason and money, and "Divrey ha-ala we-ha-nidduy" ("Words of Curse and Disavowal"), in which the poet heaps scorn on his enemies.[6]

---

[1] M., Hadas. (trans). *The Book of Delight*. New York, 1932.

[2] See: Yehudit Dishon. *The Book of Delight, Composed by Josef Ben Meir Zabara*. Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Ltd.

[3] Yehuda Ibn Shabbetai. *Menḥat Judah*, edited by Matti Huss. Ph.D. dissertation, Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1992.

[4] Fishman, Talia. A Medieval Parody of Misogyny: Judah Ibn Shabbet "Minhat Yehudah sone hanashim", Prooftexts 8 (1988), pp. 89-111.

[5] See: Yehudit Dishon, "To the Sources of Judah Ibn Shabbetai's *Minhat Judah* and Its Influence on Judah Alharizi's Marriage Maqama" (in Hebrew). *Otsar Yehudei Sfarad* (*Treasure of Sephardi Jewry*) 11-12 (1970), pp. 57-73.

[6] See: Yehudit Dishon, "A Critical Study of Excommunications by Judah Ibn Shabbetai" (in Hebrew), *Bikoret u-Farshanut* (*Criticism and Interpretation*) 4-5 (1972), p. 48.

2. *The apogee of the classical* maqama: The Hebrew *maqama* reached its creative, literary and artistic high point in *Sefer taḥkemoni* (*The Book of Wisdom*) by the writer and poet Yehuda Al-Harizi (1166-1225),[1] who turned the *maqama* into an independent literary genre in Hebrew literature. At first Al-Harizi translated the *maqama*t of Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122) into Hebrew, under the title of *Maḥbarot Itiʾel* (*The Maqamas of Itiʾel* [the name means: God is with me]),[2] and then proceeded to compose *Taḥkemoni*, in whose structure, contents and style the influence of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqama*t can be perceived very clearly.[3] *Taḥkemoni* was published in a old edition by Toporoczky,[4] and recently in a corrected and expanded version under the title *Taḥkemoni o maḥberot Heman ha-Ezraḥi* (*Taḥkemoni or the Maqamas of Heman ha-Ezraḥi*) by Yahalom and Katsumata.[5]

Yehuda Al-Harizi was bilingual in Hebrew and Arabic. His proficiency in Arabic was honed by his translations into Hebrew of al-Ḥarīrī's book and

---

[1] His original name was Yehuda Ḥarizi. He added the Arabic definite article "al-" to his name in order to make it more similar to "al-Ḥarīrī". In fact, in the Arabic script the two names are written identically, with the exception of a single diacritical point in the former name.

[2] Itiʾel is the name which the author chose for his narrator, instead of the Arabic name of al-Ḥarīrī's narrator (al-Ḥārith b. Hamām). The name is borrowed from Proverbs 30:1.

[3] See: Abd al-Raḥman Marʿī. *The Influence of Al-Ḥarīrī's Maqamat on Tehkemoni's Mehberot* (in Hebrew). Ph.D. thesis, Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1995, p. 13.

[4] Juda Alḥarizi. *The Book of Taḥkemoni*, edited by Toporoczky. Jerusalem: Maḥbarot le-sifrut, 1952.

[5] Juda Alharizi. *Taḥkemoni Or the Tales of Heman the Ezrahite*, edited and with an introduction, commentary and indices by Joseph Yahalom and Naoya Katsumata. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2009.

others. In fact, he composed poetry in Arabic,[1] and also wrote a long *maqama* in that language, which was published by Yehuda Ratshabi in 1980.[2] Al-Harizi is known also for his accounts of his travels in the East, written in both Arabic and Hebrew. Five chapters of his account was published by Yahalom and Blau in in 2003,[3] and lately Blau and others published his travelogues in their entirety, under the title of *Kitāb al-durar* (*Book of Pearls*).[4]

3) *The age of imitators and translators*: This stage lasted from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century CE. After Al-Harizi numerous Hebrew *maqama*s were composed by writers eager to demonstrate their skill in this new genre. In their works they imitated the Jewish writers who had preceded them, or translated *maqama*-like Arabic works into Hebrew. The most important of these writers are the following:

A) Yaakov Ben Eleazar (1170-1233?), a contemporary of Yehuda Al-Harizi. He traveled much in order to earn a livelihood and eventually settled in the city of Toledo in Christian Spain. His *Ha-Meshalim* (*The Proverbs*) contains an Introduction and ten *maqama*s of varying length.[5] The narrator in this case is

---

[1] See: Joseph Sadan,."Yehuda Alharizi's Biography As a Cultural Junction" (in Hebrew), *Peʿamim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 68 (1996), pp. 16-67.

[2] Yehuda Ratzhabi. "An Arabic Maqama by Alharizi" (in Hebrew). *Criticism and Interpretation* 15 (1980), pp. 5.51.

[3] Joseph Yahalom and Joshua Blau. *The Wanderings of Judah Al-Harizi: Five Accounts of His Travels*. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2003.

[4] Yehuda Al-Harizi. *Kitab al-Durar: A Book in Praise of God and the Israelite Communities*, edited by Yehoshu'a Blau, Yosef Yahalom and Yosef Yinon-Fenton. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2009.

[5] Here are the ten topics with which the book deals, in order: 1. The soul and the heart; 2. Poetry and prose; 3. Competition among poets; 4. Debate between the pen and the sword; 5. Story of a youth; 6. The intellectual and the jewel; 7. The youth and his

the author himself, and each *maqama* has a different protagonist. The book was published by Yona David as "*Love Stories by Yaakov Ben Eleazar*".[1] In Ben Eleazar's days translations from Arabic into Hebrew abounded; he himself translated ʿAbdullāh b. al-Muqaffaʿ's *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (*Kalīla and Dimna*) into Hebrew.[2]

B) Avraham Ben Ḥisday:[3] He wrote a number of *maqama*s and translated Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān's book into Hebrew under the title *Ben ha-melekh veha-nazir* (*The Prince and the Hermit*).[4] The book was republished in an expanded and corrected edition by Ayelet Ettinger in 2011,[5] as part of the series *Shirat tor ha-zahav* (*Poetry of the Golden Age*), edited by Tel-Aviv University's Israel Levin.

C) Shem-Tov Ibn Yosef Falaquera (1225-1295): An Andalusian scholar, philosopher, poet and translator, author of *Ha-Mevakesh* (*The Seeker*), whose

---

beloved; 8. The story of the small dissembling mouse; 9. A story of two lovers; 10. The wolf cub and the youth. The debate between pen and sword was a frequent theme in Arabic literature; for example, the writer Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbd (b. 324 AH) associated the pen with the sword in his writings and played a prominent role in the affairs of state as a high-ranking vizier.

[1] Yaakov Ben Eleazar. *The Love Stories of Yaakov Ben Eleazar* (in Hebrew), edited and with a commentary by Yona David. Tel-Aviv University, Tel-Aviv: Ramot, 1992.

[2] Ben Eleazar translated the book from the Arabic original, a clear indication of his profound acquaintance with that language.

[3] On Ben Ḥisday's life see: Haim Sherman. *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, edited and with notes by Ezra Fleischer. Jerusalem: Magnes and the Ben-Zvi Institute, 1997, pp. 256-278.

[4] See: Haim Sherman. *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence*, two parts. Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: Bialik Institute and Dvir, 1956.

[5] Avraham Ben Ḥisday. *The Prince and the Hermit*, edited and with an introduction and notes by Ayelet Ettinger, Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 2011.

title is borrowed from Arabic, in which it means "seeker of knowledge". He wrote this book, a literary encyclopedia of the arts and sciences, at the age of forty. The first seven chapters are written in the style of a rhymed prose *maqama*, while the rest of the book consists of regular prose.

Falaquera was knowledgeable in the philosophical literature of both Greeks and Arabs. This Jewish scholar declared that philosophy was the primary foundation of his culture, followed by religious law. He wrote numerous works in which he tried to prove that there is no contradiction between philosophy and Jewish religious law; on this issue he was in agreement with the views of the philosopher Maimonides, as expressed in the latter's *Dalīl al-ḥāʾirīn* (*Guide for the Perplexed*).[1] He also wrote on poetic criticism.[2]

D) Isaac Ben Sahula (1246 Castille – after 1300): At the age of thirty-five, in the year 1281 CE, he wrote *Mashal ha-Kadmoni* (*Fable of the Ancient*), first printed in the Italian city of Brescia in 1491, the first Hebrew book to have contained drawings.[3] The work consists of entertaining debates and discussions on ethics.

E) Kalonymus Ben Kalonymus (1287 Southern France – 1328). Ben Kalonymus translated philosophy and medicine books from Arabic into

---

[1] Falaquera wrote a book that explains and supports the positions that Maimonides takes in *Guide for the Perplexed*. See: Shem-Tov ben Joseph Ibn Falaquera, *Guide to the Guide* (in Hebrew), critical comparative edition by Yair Shifman. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2002.

[2] See: Yosef Tovi. "R. Shem-Tov Ibn Falaquera's Criticism of Poetry" (in Hebrew). In: *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress for Jewish Studies*, Part One. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990, pp. 283-290.

[3] The book was published in 1952. See: Isaac Ben Salomon Ibn Sahula. *The Fable of the Ancients* (in Hebrew). Vocalized edition with 79 drawings. Tel-Aviv: Maḥbarot le-sifrut, 1952.

Hebrew. He completed his famous work *Even Boḥan* (*The Gauge*) in 1322 in Catalonia.[1] The book levels mocking criticism at negative aspects of his society and calls for nobility of character.[2]

## Composers of *maqama*s towards the end of the Andalusian period

The Hebrew *maqāma* reached its zenith in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE. In the following two centuries the number of writers who used this genre fell quite considerably. Among the latter we may count the following:[3]

A) Shmuel Ben Yosef Ben Sason (lived in the first half of the fourteenth century): He composed the book *Avney Shoham* (*Onyx Stones*),[4] a long *maqama* in which the author describes the situation of the Jews in Castile in his days, the difficulties they encountered in their efforts to make a livelihood, and especially the burden of taxation and the political instability.

B) Isaac Pulgar: A contemporary of Ibn Sason, he composed a book entitled *Ezer ha-dat* (*The Support of Faith*),[5] in which he attempted to reconcile religion with philosophy. The work consists of a dialogue between two debaters, an old

---

[1] A printed edition of the book was published in 1865 in Leiberg (Germany). Later an expanded and revised edition was published: Kalonymus ben Kalonymus. *Even Boḥan* (in Hebrew), edited by Abraham Meir Habermann, Tel-Aviv: Maḥbarot le-sifrut, 1956. For more on the author and the book, see: Haim Shirman, *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997, pp. 514-541.

[2] See: Dan Almagor. "Social Satire in Hebrew Maqama Literature" (in Hebrew). *Ali Siaḥ: Literary Conversation*, 7-8 (1980), p. 134.

[3] See: Yehuda Ratshabi. *Collection of Hebrew Maqamas: Rhymed Stories* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and Dorot Library, 1974, pp. 30-32.

[4] See: Shmuel Ben Yosef Ibn Sason. *Book of Onyx Stones* (in Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Maḥbarot le-sifrut, 1962.

[5] Isaac Ben Joseph Ibn Pulgar. *'Ezer ha-Dat* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem, no publisher, 1970.

man who represents faith and a youth who represents philosophy. After a vigorous debate they go to present their respective cases before a judge, who decides that there can be no wisdom without faith and that the two of them must learn to live together.

C) Shem-Tov Ardutiel (born in the fourteenth century in Castile): The *maqama* he wrote, entitled *Maʿase ha-rav* (*The Rabbi's Deed*) or *Milḥemet ha-ʿet weha-misparayim* (*War of the Pen and the Scissors*), relates events that occurred in the year 1345. The author was alone at home, engaged in writing, when his pen broke. The author vented all his wrath on the pen, whereupon the scissors came up to the author and asked him to use them to write. The pen then intervened and a violent engagement ensued, at the end of which the pen was victorious over the scissors. The *maqāma* was published in an extended, revised edition in 1980.[1]

D) Don Vidal Benveniste (born at the end of the fourteenth century in Zaragoza):[2] At the beginning of the fifteenth century he composed a *maqāma* entitled *ʿOfer we-Dina* (*ʿOfer and Dina*), an entertaining story about ʿOfer, a rich elderly widower, who wishes to marry the considerably younger girl Dina. He promises her and her father that he would ensure both of them a life of plenty and opulence. Dina and her father accepted this attractive offer. However, after the wedding it turned out that ʿOfer was impotent, and took various medicaments and tonics in order to enhance his sexual prowess, but instead they caused his death. The governor learned of this affair, expelled the deceased's wife and his relatives, and confiscated his property. In addition to its

---

[1] See: Shem Tob Ben Izhak Ardutiel. *The Debate between the Pen and the Scissors* (in Hebrew), edited with Introduction, commentary and notes by Yehuda Nini and Maya Fruchtman. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1980.

[2] On his literary career, see: Haim Shirman. *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, pp. 601-614.

entertaining aspect, the story also deals with historical and literary issues of the times. The book has recently been published by Matti Huss.[1]

## *Maqama*s in other lands

The composition of *maqama*s by Jewish writers who were attached to the genre spread beyond the borders of al-Andalus to neighboring lands and beyond, especially in the following:

A) *France*: Jedaiah ha-Penini, full name Jedaiah Ben Abraham ha-Penini or Bedersi (1270-1340), was born in France, but toward the end of his life he emigrated to Barcelona. Physician, philosopher and poet, he was greatly influenced by the writings of Maimonides.[2] He composed a *maqama* entitled *Ohev nashim* (*In Defense of Women*) or *Tsiltsal Knafayim* (*Rustle of Wings*) at the age of eighteen, as he notes in the Introduction. This work, in which the author defends and praises women, is a rebuttal to Yehuda Ibn Shabbetay's *Sone nashim* (*The Misogynist*). The *maqama* contains many lines of rhymed prose. Bedersi also wrote a book on philosophy entitled *Beḥinat ʿolam* (*The Examination of the World*) (printed in London, 1886), in which he praises Maimonides' philosophical works following Rabbi Shlomo Ben Abraham Ben Aderet's ban in the study of Maimonides' writings.[3]

---

[1] Matti Huss. *Dina-Vidal Benvenistes' Melitsat Efer ve-Don*, studies and critical edition. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003.

[2] On his biography see: Avraham Meir Haberman (author and editor) and Mordechai Margaliot. "Jedaiah Hapnini" (in Hebrew). *Encyclopedia for the Biographies of Great People of Israel*, 1990, pp. 586-588; Haim Shirman. *History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*, pp. 499-513.

[3] Maimonides was born in 1135 in Cordoba, Spain and died in 1203 in Egypt. At the age of thirteen his family moved to the city of Fez in Morocco, then to various other places, and finally settled in Fustat, Egypt. He was thirty years old at the time. Maimonides wrote all his works in Arabic and they were subsequently translated into

B) *Jerusalem*: Joseph Ben Tanḥum Ha-Yerushalmi (1262-1330). His place of birth is not known with certainty, although it is likely that he was born in Jerusalem, as the protagonist in his *maqama* states, and as his last name "Ha-Yerushalmi" ("the Jerusalemite") would seem to indicate. At the end of his life he lived with his family in Egypt, where he also died.

Ha-Yerushalmi was a prominent grammarian and biblical exegete in the East. He was well versed in both Hebrew and Arabic and composed two important works, *ʿArugat ha-besamim* (*Bed of Herbs*)[1] and a collection of poems, that he wrote in 1277, at the age of fifteen. The poems are arranged in seven parts, according to subject, as follows: Panegyrics, love, wine, elegy, *piyyuṭ* (religious hymns), *maqama*s and epistles, with considerable use of paronomasia. To date four *maqama*s by ha-Yerushalmi have been discovered in manuscript form and published by scholars who have recently obtained them. The four are: *The Rivalry between the Old Man and the Youth*, *The Birds*, *The Borrowings*[2] and *The Puns*. The latter was published by Yehudit Dishon.[3] The

Hebrew, with the exception of *Ha-Yad ha-Ḥazaqa* (*The Strong Hand*), which he wrote in Hebrew. In his books *al-Sirāj* (*Commentary on the Mishna*) and *Dalīl al-ḥāʾirīn* (*Guide for the Perplexed*) he utilized philosophy and logic in order to determine what God meant, and in doing so aroused the wrath of Jewish conservatives, who issued a ban on his books, which was, however, lifted subsequently. Ha-Penini, it should be noted, was born seventy years after Maimonides' death; however, he considered himself a pupil of Maimonides and vigorously defended his writings.

[1] See: Yehudit Dishon. *The Book of the Perfumed Flower Beds by Joseph ben Tanchum Hayerushalmi* (in Hebrew). Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2005.

[2] Ibid., p. 14, note 21.

[3] This study by Yehudit Dishon appeared in two places: "The Maqama of Homonyms by Joseph ben Tanchum Hayerushalmi" (in Hebrew). *Dappim: Research in Literature* 12 (1999/2000), pp. 25-63, and *The Gardens of Perfume by Joseph ben Tanchum*

narrator of this *maqama* is one Aḥiṭov Ben Taḥkemoni, a skilled versifier who traveled from his native Spain to Jerusalem, with a halt in Egypt on his journey. The protagonist is not given a name, but he appears to be the author himself. The protagonist dazzles the narrator with poems which he composed from his own mind, so that the narrator thought that he must be Andalusian in origin, and was truly surprised to learn that he was from Jerusalem.

C) *Italy*: Immanuel Ha-Romi (1260-1328), one of the greatest Hebrew poets in Italy, who composed *Maḥberot Immanuel* (*Immanuel's Maqama*s) (that is, the author ascribed the *maqama*s to himself).[1] The book contains twenty-eight *maqama*s in which the author figures as the protagonist. The plots of the stories revolve around generosity and miserliness, physicians, the wealthy, the stupid and the intelligent, women who betray their husbands, wine and life's pleasures. The *maqama*s also contain stories and riddles, questions and answers, fables, elegies and poems about the zodiac and time.

The book shows the influence of the Jewish Andalusian poets Shelomo Ben Gabirol and Yehuda ha-Levy, and also copies al-Ḥarizi's style as far as themes and language are concerned.[2] In addition, it shows influences of contemporary Italian literature, in particular Dante's *Divine Comedy*.[3]

---

*Hayerushalmi* (in Hebrew). Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2005, pp. 407-458.

[1] Immanuel ha-Romi. *Maḥberot Immanuel Haromi* (in Hebrew), edited and with an introduction, notes and sources by Dov Yarden. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1957.

[2] See: Matti Huss. "The Status of Fiction in the Hebrew Maqama: Judah Alharizi and Immanuel of Rome". *Tarbiz: Hebrew Quarterly for Judaic Stucies 67*:3 (1998), pp. 351-378.

[3] See: Ezer Kahanoff. "Interpreting Emmanuel Haromi's Inferno and Heaven through Dante's Divine Comedy" (in Hebrew). *Maʿof u-maʿase: Journal of Theory and Research* 6 (2000), pp. 31-45.

Three centuries later two important Italian writers composed *maqama*s dealing with social criticism. The first, Yona ha-Kohen, grew up during the second half of the seventeenth century (c. 1680). He wrote a mocking composition entitled *Pilpul 'al zeman, zemanim u-zemanehem* (*Dispute Concerning Time, Times and Their Times*),[1] about how Christians lived and about religious rites in the church. The very fact that such a work could be written is evidence for the religious freedom that Italian Jews enjoyed at the time. The second poet, Immanuel Fransish (1618-after 1710), was a rabbi and cantor who wrote two *maqama*s, one a mocking critique of Jewish clerics in his days and the other a reproving look at women who treat their husbands harshly.

D) *Yemen*: Rabbi Yaḥya Zekharya al-Ẓāhiri (1519-1583), also known as Yaḥyā Ben Sa'īd. At the age of twenty he left his native Yemen and traveled to India, Persia, Iraq and the Holy Land, where he visited the cities of Safed and Tiberias, and then continued on to Egypt. He composed the well-known *Sefer ha-musar* (*Book of Ethics*),[2] which he wrote in the years 1568-1569. The book describes the scenes he saw and the thoughts that crossed his mind on his travels. It shows the influence of *Taḥkemoni* and *Maḥberot Immanuel*, and imitates al-Ḥarīrī's *maqamat*; in other words, it is based on a mixture of Arabic and Hebrew culture.[3]

---

[1] See: Raba Jonah. *Zeman Zemamim Zemanehem*. London: J. Jacobs, 1908.

[2] Zechariya al-Dahri. *Book of Ethics* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1965.

[3] For example, al-Dahri's *Maqama* 33 is a literal translation of al-Ḥarīrī's 23rd *maqama*. Other *maqama*s show the direct influence of al-Ḥarīrī; for example, *Maqama* 1 is influenced by al-Ḥarīrī's 16th *maqama* and *Maqama* 19 is influenced by al-Ḥarīrī's 39th *maqama*. See: Yehuda Ratzhabi. "The Influence of Al-Hariri upon Al-Dahri" (in Hebrew). *Criticism and Interpretation* 11-12 (1974), pp. 55-83.

The book's importance lies in the information that they provide about the Jewish community in sixteenth-century Yemen. Thus, for example, the author discusses contemporary Jewish poets, especially Rabbi Joseph Ben Israel.[1]

*4. The age of revival*: In the eighteenth century the center of the composition of *maqāma*s moved to Europe. Structurally the *maqama*s of this period were basically imitations of *Taḥkemoni*. However, their contents were very varied. Some dealt with ethics, others with manners, some took the form of animal stories with a lesson or showed how to obtain knowledge. The vocabulary included many difficult words, based on the language of the Old Testament. The works were usually written in an entertaining manner, for amusement, drawing attention to negative aspects of society that should be corrected, and inculcating elevated morals.[2]

Among the most important authors who wrote works in the *maqama* genre are the following:[3]

A. Shlomo Ḥalma (1720-1782), a pioneer writer of the age of revival in Eastern Europe, whose works are an attempt to combine the Bible with science. He derided the way in which the works of Maimonides were taught in the synagogues.

B. Yehuda Ben Mordechai Horovitz (d. 1797), the author of ʿAmudey beyt Yehuda (*Pillars of the House of Judah*),[1] a book of fifty *maqama*s that imitate a

---

[1] See: Yehuda Amir. "A Poem by R. Zecharia Alazhiri in Praise of R. Yosef ben Israel: On the Relationship between Two Hebrew Poets in Yemen in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" (in Hebrew). *Pe ʿamim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 59 (1994), pp. 79-84.

[2] See: Nurit Guvrin. "The Style of the Maqama in Hebrew Poetry in Recent Generations" (in Hebrew). *Ma ʾasef le-divrei Sifrut* 8-9 (1986), pp. 394-419.

[3] See; Yehuda Ratzhabi. *Collection of Hebrew Maqamas: Rhymed Stories* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and Dorot Library, 1974, pp. 40-44..44

number of Al-Harizi's works in this genre. They all consist of a dialogue between a student and his wise teacher; their themes are wisdom and criticism of contemporary Jewish life.

C. Wolf Buchner (1750-1820), whose works imitate the poets of the Middle Ages, especially Shelomo Ibn Gabirol and Yehuda Al-Harizi. His *Zeved ha-melitsa* (*Cream of Rhetoric*; Prague, 1794) contains ten *maqama*s, whose main pivot consists of the story. The main purpose of these delightful stories is to promote good morals. The *maqama*s were written in imitation of Al-Harizi, as can be seen in three of the stories, which contain dialogues between generosity and miserliness, a physician and a rustic, and a beautiful and an ugly woman.

D. Isaac Satanov (1732-1804), author of *Sefer ha-ḥizayon* (*Book of Vision*), consisting of eight *maqama*s in imitation of *Taḥkemoni*. The topics which these *maqama*s address are as follows: Stories about the language of animals, swindlers and tricksters, knowledge and ethics, praise for wisdom and research. Satanov, it should be noted, published Immanual Haromi's *Maḥbarot* (Berlin, 1796), and wrote poems in the former's style.

E. Shmuel Arieh Tsahalin, who became renowned for his book *Shlomo mul Adar* (*Shlomo versus Adar*), which contains fourteen *maqama*s. The first seven are stories about various important Jewish characters, such as the storyteller, the cleric and the physician, through whom he criticizes social life in the Jewish communities of his times. The other seven *maqama*s contain religious exhortations.

F. Moshe Mendelssohn Frankfurt (1780-1861) wrote *Pney tevel* (*Face of the World*), with fifty-five *maqama*s that imitate *Taḥkemoni* and *Maḥberot*

---

[1] Yehuda Horovitz Ben Mordechai. *Pillars of Judah* (in Hebrew). Amsterdam, 1786.

*Haromi*. The *maqama*s deal with a variety of different topics, such as journeys, dialogue, criticism, biography, history and contemporary literature.

G. Shlomo Ḥatsner (1842-1914), the youngest writer in the age of revival, was also a scholar and critic of medieval Hebrew literature. In 1864 he wrote *Leyl shimurim* (*A Night of Wakefulness*), a satiric account of the events of the first night of Passover, in which the prophet Elijah appears to the author and speaks to him. Elijah criticizes the orthodox Jewish Hassidim and their superstitions. In 1885 he wrote *Zikhronont* (*Memoirs*), a book that contains nine *maqama*s, which deal with unsavory characters in Jewish society, such as an ignorant woman who arouses discord, the Jewish mystic and the hypocrite, the rabbi and the preacher, the cantor and the miser.

5. *The modern period*: *Maqama*s were also written in the modern period, that is, from the mid-nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century. This period can be divided into two distinct stages in the literature of the Jewish people, the first until 1948 (about one-hundred years) and the second since 1948 (about sixty years).

*The first stage*: The pioneers of this stage adopted two different styles of writing. One of these was satiric imitation. The first writer to have written a *maqama* in the modern period was Joseph Brill (1839-1919), who made a reputation for himself by composing satirical imitations of the style of the Talmud and Jewish religious law, which he used in order to criticize characters such as the rabbi, the storyteller, the physician and others. Burstein (1857-1944) constructed his satirical imitations using the Indian style of animal fables.

The second style of writing in this period consisted of legends and anecdotes. Thus Shimon Bikhar (1823-1891) wrote *maqama*-like stories about the wise King Solomon in the vein of oriental legends and folklore. Ben Zion (1870-

1932) wrote in the manner of "Worn sandals", which originally was an entertaining Arabic legend.

One of the most famous practitioners of this genre was Haim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934), with his *maqama Aluf betsalot ve-aluf shum* (*Knight of Onions and Knight of Garlic*).[1] This *maqama* consists of twelve short parts that were first published in 1928. This "folk witticism in rhyme", as Bialik defined it, was originally written as a children's story, but it is appropriate for adults as well.

The *maqama* tells the story of a prince who journeyed to distant places, but was disappointed to find nothing new in the world. One day he entered a palace, where he ate a sumptuous meal, but discovered that it lacked onion. He mentioned this to his host and suggested that onion be added to the menu. The king then asked the cook to prepare a dish with onion. The king and his retinue tasted the new dish and found it to be delicious. The king was grateful and gave the prince a precious gift. The prince then returned to his homeland. Another prince heard this story and invited him to his palace. He took some garlic with him and with it he won the admiration of his host.

Originally this *maqāma* was written to entertain, but it also has a serious critical intent. Shamir[2] claims that on the surface the *maqama* is entertaining and diverting, but its inner aspect is very serious. Bergman,[3] on the other hand, argues that its purpose was to express biting criticism of the European

---

[1] Hayyim Nahman Bialik. *Knight of Onions and Knight of Garlic* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Dvir, 1980.

[2] Ziva Shamir. "The Amused Mask and Its Serious Face: A Study on Bialik's 'Folk Joke' *Knight of Onions and Knight of Garlic*" (in Hebrew). Sadan: *Studies in Hebrew Literature* 1 (1994), p. 173.

[3] Dvora Bergman. "The Genealogy of *Knight of Onion and Knight of Garlic*" (in Hebrew). *Isaac Bacon Volume: Belles-Lettres and Literary Studies*, edited by Aharon Komem, Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1992.

aristocratic class, that was immersed in its own life of luxury and cared not at all for onions and garlic, that represent the marginalized wording classes. Bialik in this *maqama* focused very much on the language; he used loans from the ancient Jewish sources, such as the Bible, the Mishna, the Talmud and the Jewish poetry from medieval Spain.[1]

*The second stage*: The fact that Bialik, one of the most important Hebrew writers in the modern period, wrote a *maqama*, brought this genre unto the literary stage and created the possibility for other writers to do likewise.

The credit for introducing the *maqama* into the Israeli world goes to the poet Nathan Alterman (1910-1970). In 1955 he wrote a *maqama* in rhymed prose and filled with allusions to the Bible in honor of his friend Yosifon. It was recited at a party attended by many writers and won great acclaim. This encouraged him to continue to write in this genre. His next *maqama* was *'Ir ha-yona* (*City of the Dove*),[2] which in its style and its themes is reminiscent of the compositions of Immanuel Haromi. The narrator is the author himself, who speaks in the first person, while the protagonist is Masha Bar Hassid (that is, Masha son of the *hassid*), an adventurous man full of wiles and possessed of a quick tongue, as is commonly the case in classical *maqama*s.

His second book, *Ḥagigat qayits* (*Summer Celebration*)[3] (original title: *Mishley qayits* [*Summer Proverbs*]), written in imitation of *maqama*s such as Isaac Ibn Sahula's *Mashal Haqadmoni* and *Mishley 'Arav le-Yitzhak* (*Isaac's Arabian Proverbs*), was published in 1965. Here the style is poetic, a fact which raised

---

[1] The *maqama* was rewritten as a screenplay for a musical, that was broadcast on Israeli television's First Channel in 1982.

[2] Natan Alterman. *City of the Dove* (in Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1971.

[3] Natan Alterman. *Summer Celebration* (in Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1977.

objections from critics, because its genre could not be easily defined; some consider it a *maqama*.[1]

Subsequently there was Haim Hefer (b. 1925), who said of his experience in the genre that "since 1960 or so I began to write *maqama*s. At first this was by chance, when we began to write *The Dove* with Dan Ben Amots, we hung a *maqama* on a bulletin board in Tel-Aviv, which was very successful. I then began to write *maqama*s for friends and for special occasions, and felt that people liked and accepted them. I therefore decided that I would dedicate my satirical column in the newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* to the *maqama*".[2]

On 9.6.1967, as the dimensions of the Israeli victory over the Arab armies in the Six Day War became clear, Hefer published a short *maqama* on the front page of *Yediot Aharonot*, entitled *We Were As in a Dream*, in which he described an imaginary encounter between the IDF Chief of the General Staff at the time, Yitzhak Rabin, and King David, in Jerusalem. He subsequently developed this idea in a book entitled *Misdar ha-lohamim* (*Parade of Combatants*).[3] The book describes the heroism of the IDF, which was able to overcome the Arab armies, and mourns the dead. Hefer continued for many more years to publish a weekly *maqama* in *Yediot Aharonot*, in which he dealt with current events.

Didi Menussi (b. 1928) also had a weekly column in *Yediot Aharonot* for thirty-eight years (between 1962 and 2000), which took the form of a satirical

---

[1] See: Ruth Karton-Bloom. *The Clown and the Shadow: A Summer Celebration for Natan Alterman* (in Hebrew) Tel-Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1994.

[2] Tsur Ehrlich. *Maqor Rishon* newspaper, 8.4.2005.

[3] Haim Hefer. *Misdar ha-lohamim* (*Parade of Combatants*) (in Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Amikam 1968.

*maqāma* on current events. The biting criticism in these *maqama*s angered many of his readers.

Today there are still some writers who compose *maqama*s for the local Hebrew press, in the form of literary or recreational articles. Thus, for example, on the occasion of Israel's sixtieth Independence Day Gideon Lehavi wrote a *maqama* in which he summarized the major events in the country from 1948 to 2008, events both joyous and sad that have left their imprint in the nation's memory and were cast into the rhymed prose of the *maqama*.[1]

## The distinctive features and style of the Hebrew *maqama*

The Hebrew *maqama* is the only genre of the Andalusian period that has succeeded in imposing itself on Hebrew literature throughout its entire history. It has withstood the test of time and remained in use, whereas the Hebrew columnar and stanzaic poems disappeared over time. The question thus arises: What was it that gave the *maqama* its immortality?

The structural feature that most characterizes the *maqama* is that it adapts itself to the place and the time of its composition and is not restricted to any strict or stable pattern, as is the case of columnar poetry. It is not difficult for an author to produced rhymed prose consisting of two or more sentences, and the listener can easily train himself to appreciate it musical sound. Another distinctive feature of the *maqama* is that its composer can use any theme he likes, ancient as well as innovative, without any restriction, and so can gain the readers' appreciation wherever they are. These features naturally made it easy for writers to use the *maqama* style, and this in turn ensured the genre's survival to this day.

---

[1] See the website: www.slicha.co.il/slicha/ShowItem.asp?Id=5540&idcategory=91

In fact, there is a controversy among contemporary Hebrew literary critics[1] as to whether the works in question should be considered *maqama*s or rather prose fiction with certain *maqama*-like characteristics. The reason for this lies in the variety and multiplicity of prose styles in use, and a confusion between story and *maqama*. In order to clarify this issue we argue that a Hebrew *maqama* should be defined in the same way as an Arabic one, namely as a work that manifests the following four main elements:

A. Rhymed prose: The very first thing that leaps to the eye when seeing a Hebrew *maqama* is its prose form, most often rhymed. This is thus a basic element of the *maqama*.[2]

B. Narration and protagonist: The narrator either accompanies the protagonist or meets him be chance. He relates the protagonist's humorous and serious actions and adventures. In some *maqama*s we find the roles intermixed, or filled by the author himself.[3]

C. The incident that occasions the *maqama*; this can take the form of a short story, or an extended tale that lures the reader.

---

[1] The critic Shmuel Stern, for example recognizes as true *maqama*s only those that have the form of al-Ḥarīrī's classical works, while Haim Shirman mixes the classical and Andalusian *maqama*t. Yehudit Dishon distinguishes between classical and Andalusian *maqama*t and provides a distinct definition of each (Yehudit Dishon. *Joseph Ibn Zabara's Book of Amusements* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Reuven Mass Ltd., 1986, pp. 22-30). Dishon's view is preferable, since it takes the Arabic *maqama* into account.

[2] The rhymed prose may be limited to two hemistiches, or three or four. Sometimes the rhymed sentences have a common theme.

[3] As in Jacob Ben Eleazar's *Sefer ha-meshalim* (*Book of Proverbs*), Immanuel Haromi's *maqama*s and *Minḥat Yehuda* (*Judah's Offering*).

D. A variety of themes: *Maqama*s deal with the entire gamut of topics addressed by Hebrew poetry; some are general traditions topics, while others concern the lives of the Jewish people specifically.

The style of Hebrew *maqama*s involves mutually fitting expressive devices that give them great beauty. The most important of these devices are the following:

A. Verbal embellishments: The language of the *maqama*s is akin to that of poetry and possesses a musical rhythm. The authors of *maqama*s, under the influence of Arabic, thus made an effort to adopt stylistic and rhetorical embellishments, especially the use of homonyms, in both prose and poetry. Yehuda Al-Harizi in the 33rd *maqama*s of his *Taḥkemoni* put two passages using this device, a short letter in which every pair of lines ends in the same word, and a group of twenty-two doublets arranged in the order of the Hebrew alphabet and with the first member of the homonymic pair in the middle of the line and the second at the end.[1]

Ibn Tanḥum Hayerushalmi also wrote a *maqama* that contains many verses written in the style of homonymy, as he noted explicitly: "He also has a *maqama* known as 'the *maqama* of homonymy'", which was edited and published by Yehudit Dishon.[2] This *maqama* deals with all the familiar classical motifs and themes of Andalusian literature.

B. Juxtaposition of prose and poetry: Most *maqama*s contain lines of verse, usually at the end, to summarize the events. Here the protagonist defines

---

[1] In the eighteenth *maqama* Al-Harizi says that a poet from Arbīl attempted to compose a group of lines of poetry structured according to homonymy pairs, in imitation of Moshe Ibn Ezra, but did not succeed.

[2] Yehudit Dishon."The Maqama of Homonyms by Joseph ben Tanchum Hayerushalmi" (in Hebrew). *Dappim: Research in Literature* 12 (1999/2000), pp. 25-63.

himself. Occasionally verses also appear in the middle of the work, where they complement the prose narration.

C. Allusions to the Old Testament: Such allusions can take two forms, linguistic, that is, the use of biblical words and phrases in order to elevate the style of writing, and substantive, that is, an allusion whose content is linked to the events related by the author.[1] In such cases it is necessary to be familiar with the biblical source in order to fully understand the author's intention.

To this we must add that most Hebrew books of *maqama*s are preceded by an Introduction, in the manner of al-Hamdhānī, who was followed in this by al-Ḥarīrī. These Introductions became an inseparable part of the book. In Arabic *maqamat* the Introduction serves to shed light on the motivation for writing a non-religion book, the topics with which it deals, the identity of the author, and the book's style.[2]

The Introductions to Hebrew *maqama*s possess these elements as well, to which they added some unique elements of their own, that are characteristic of Hebrew literature: They begin with praise for and words of thanks to God; the motivation for writing a secular book that focuses on national cultural and ethical factors, in particular the use of the Hebrew language in order to promote its status at a time when the Jews spoke the local vernaculars; personal and biographical details of the author; praises for the book and its sources, as well as its dedication to others (in order to obtain contributions); the Introduction ends with further words of praise and thanks to God.[3]

---

[1] See: Dan Pagis. *Change and Tradition in Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Keter, 1976, pp. 115-204.

[2] J. Hameen- Anttila. *Maqama- A History of Genre*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2002.

[3] See: Revital Yefet-Rafael. "Authors' Introductions in the Hebrew Maqama and Its Variations" (in Hebrew). *Criticism and Interpretation* 39 (2007), pp. 125-168.

In Andalusia two types of *maqama* evolved. One is the classical type, constructed on the pattern of al-Ḥarīrī's compositions, exemplified by the *maqama*t of al-Sarqusṭi and Yehuda Al-Harizi. The latter was the only Hebrew writer who imitated al-Ḥarīrī's *maqamat* in both structure and content; in every one of his fifty or so *maqama*s the narrator is *Hayman Ha'czraḥi* and the hero is *Ḥever Haqeyni*; The *maqama*s are unconnected to each other; each *maqama* consists of the same three parts: a prologue, the main event, and an epilogue.

The second type of *maqama* is represented by all the Hebrew *maqama*s with the exception of those composed by Yehuda Al-Harizi. The *maqama*s of this type do not adhere to the above-mentioned structure. Some of these works are very long and contain a number of different stories, nor are the protagonists always the same.

The *maqama* thus no longer spoke about the issue of beggary and trickery with which it had been associated, but became a kind of epistle[1] that described scenes from people's lives or a journey thorough al-Andalus or abroad, boasted about the relative virtues of different parts of al-Andalus, bemoaned the fate of cities destroyed in war, and more. There are those who call such literary works "*maqama*-like", or "possessing *maqama*-like characteristics".[2] This type of *maqama* can thus be seen to consist of a mixture of the oriental *maqama* and the European short story.[3]

In the table below we summarize the differences between the classical and the Andalusian *maqama*t, in the following categories:

---

[1] Note that Ibn Falaquera called his work an *igeret* ("epistle").

[2] See: Dan Pagis. *Change and Tradition in Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Keter, 1976, pp. 199-244.

[3] See: H. Nemah. "Andalusian Maqamat", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 5(1974), pp.83-92.

| Category | Classical *maqama* | Andalusian *maqama* |
|---|---|---|
| Rhymed prose | Rhymed prose with many linguistic and rhetorical embellishments, and many difficult words | Rhymed prose based on euphony, hemistich structure and repetition |
| Themes | A variety of traditional themes in which there are many repeated motifs borrowed from traditional poetry | Many themes borrowed from the Andalusian environment; especially common are *maqama*s describing places, or dealing in politics, criticism and social issues |
| The protagonist and the narrator | They are two independent figures that meet at the beginning of every *maqama*. The narrator begins the *maqama* by preparing the ground for the protagonist's appearance, and at the end the two become acquainted | It is rare that both figures appear in the *maqama*; occasionally the narrator and the protagonist exchange roles; personalities are well developed |
| Structure | Each *maqama* is independent, with no connection to the preceding or following one. Every *maqama* consists of three parts and contains a | The *maqama* is long and is located within an extended narrative framework. Some *maqama*s contain only a single story while others contain several |

| | narrative element | |
|---|---|---|
| Influences of other genres | The basic structure of the *maqama* is the classical poem (*qaṣīda*), into which a number of innovations were introduced | Epistles and travel literature; the *maqama*s the events and journeys described in these genres |
| Beggary | Beggary is considered an essential part of the *maqama*, constituting the main dramatic occurrence in it | This element is noticeably missing |
| Poetry | A few short verses said by the protagonist within the narration or at the end | Long poems, sometimes replacing the prose narration, composed by the protagonist or some secondary characters |

From this table we see that the classical *maqama* is fundamental; it emerged in the Arab East and took on a pattern that was appropriate to the social circumstances in which it was born. The *maqama* came to al-Andalus by way of scholars, travelers and merchants. The Andalusians were very fond of imitating the Arabs of the East; in fact al-Saraqusṭī followed in al-Ḥarīrī's footsteps, as he admits quite explicitly in the Introduction to his *maqama*t.[1]

---

[1] Abū al-Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Saraqusṭī. *Al-Mamamat al-luzūmiyya lil-Saraqusṭī*, ed. by Badr Aḥmad Ḍayf, Alexandria: al-Hayʼa al-miṣriyya al-ʻāmma lil-kitāb, 1982, p. 3.

Yehuda Al-Harizi, too, imitated al-Ḥarīrī after having translated the latter's *maqama*t into Hebrew, as he noted in his Introduction to *Taḥkamoni*.[1]However, all other writers, Arabs and Jews alike, did not imitate al-Ḥarīrī's model; rather, they were greatly influenced by the Andalusian landscape, in the sense that they modified this genre to make in compatible with their environment and made it conform more to the story type that was familiar in Europe. The Andalusian *maqamat* is thus a blend of East and West, part imitation of the Arabs of the East and part the innovations of the people of Western Europe.

---

[1] He says of him: "A wise man of the Ismāʿīlīs, an excellent scholar, his language fluent in the rhetoric of the Arabs, poetry flows from his limbs, known by the name of al-Ḥarīrī. There is none like him in the composition of *maqama*s". See: Yehuda Al-Harizi. *Sefer Taḥkemoni*, ed. by Y. Toporovsky. Jerusalem: Maḥbarot le-sifrut, 1952, p. 11.

## Conclusion

No sooner had the Arabic *maqama* made its appearance in the literary life of the Arab East, than a tempestuous flow of this art moved to the West, where Jewish writers imitated it and demonstrated to the Andalusian Arabs and others that it was possible to compose *maqama*s in Hebrew, despite the fact that the vocabulary of the latter language did not suffice to express oneself in all domains in as complete a manner as in Arabic, as some medieval Jewish writers claimed.[1]

Poetry and the *maqama* are two of the most important literary genres that Hebrew literature adopted in al-Andalus. Both were originally foreign to Jewish culture, but quickly became an integral component of the Hebrew literary and cultural heritage. But while classical poetry ceased from coming to light because of its prosodic restrictions, the *maqama* continue to blaze a path for itself in different lands over succeeding time intervals, during which writers studied this genre and composed works in it, even as they introduced some changes in its structure and content. Interestingly enough both journalists and writers have again shown an interest in the genre in recent times, and have been using it in the press and on stage in a satirical manner, with the double purpose of entertaining and criticizing negative aspects.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 12.

# The Genre of the *Maqama* in Hebrew Literature:

# Evolution and Style

**Abd- al Rahman Mar'i**

The age of Muslim Spain was one of the most significant periods in the history of Hebrew literature since its beginnings. At a time when Hebrew no longer served for everyday speech it became the common language of poets. This change did not occur in a vacuum; it was the product of the influence of Arabic language and culture. Hebrew poetry copied the patterns of Arabic poetry in the Arab East and in al-Andalus, giving rise to genres previously unknown in Hebrew literature, such as the *maqama* and the *muwashshat*. The same is true of the motifs, maxims and proverbs, which at first were newcomers to the Jewish world but which in a short time were transmuted into integral elements of Jewish culture on Andalusian territory.

In this study we shall examine one aspect of these influences, namely the evolution of the genre of the *maqama* in Hebrew literature, from its birth to this day in al-Andalus, Europe, the Middle East and Israel after the establishment of the State in 1948, and shed light on it most important sources, practitioners and styles.                                     1-31