

The Themes of Calling for Help and Redemption in Arabic and Hebrew Poems from Medieval Spain during the Eleventh and Twelfth Century¹

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Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel werden einige Beispiele der Themen „Anrufung um Hilfe und Erlösung“ in der arabischen und hebräischen Poesie, im speziellen die des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts im muslimischen Spaniens, erläutert. Des Weiteren wird ein kurzer Einblick in das Leben zweier Dichter des Mittelalters gewährt: Der sizilianisch-arabische Dichter Ibn Ḥamdīs (ca. 1056–ca. 1133) und der spanisch-jüdische Dichter Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1138). Beide waren zur gleichen Zeit im muslimischen Spanien tätig und teilten das Schicksal der Flucht und des Exils. Unter Berücksichtigung der Exilsituation werden die Topoi Anrufung um Beistand und Erlösung sowie das verwandte Motiv des Heimwehs nach dem Vaterland durch eine komparative Analyse in Bezug auf andere andalusisch-jüdische und muslimische Dichter erörtert.

Abstract

In this article we will present a few examples of the theme of “calling for help and redemption” in Arabic and Hebrew poetry, with particular focus on eleventh and twelfth century Muslim Spain. More particularly, we will offer a glimpse into the life and oeuvre of two medieval poets (one Muslim, one Jewish); both were active in Muslim Spain in the same period and shared a similar fate of exile and wandering: on the one hand, the Sicilian Arabic poet Ibn Ḥamdīs (c. 1056–c. 1133) and on the other hand, the Spanish Jewish poet Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1138). We will take into account the impact of exile and wandering on the profusion of the theme of “calling for help and redemption”

¹ Abdallah Tarabieh wrote a draft text in Hebrew, which Joachim Yeshaya edited and translated. We then reworked the entire paper together. We are also deeply grateful to our colleagues Arie Schippers (Amsterdam), Stefan Sperl (London) and Yosef Tobi (Haifa) for their stimulating suggestions and remarks.

as well as the related theme of “yearning for one’s homeland” through an analysis and comparison of poetic fragments by the two aforementioned poets as well as additional Andalusian Jewish (Judah ha-Levi) and Muslim (Ibn Khafāja, al-Rundī and Ibn al-Abbār) poets.

1. Introduction

In this article we will present a few examples of a poetic theme, referred to in Arabic with the terms *Istiṣrākh* or *Istighātha*.² Admittedly, we will not be able to realize here a full-fledged comparative study of the development of this theme in both Arabic and Hebrew poetry. Such a comparative study would need to address the extent to which the theme “calling for help and redemption” had also existed in Hebrew poetry, including a discussion of its main similarities as well as its differences to Arabic poetry.³ Rather, we will focus for the most part on eleventh- and twelfth-century Spain and offer only a glimpse into the life and oeuvre of two medieval poets (one Muslim, one Jewish); both were active in Spain in the same period and shared a similar fate of exile and wandering: namely, the Sicilian Arabic poet Ibn Ḥamdīs (c. 1056–c. 1133) and the Spanish Jewish poet Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1138).⁴

² The meaning of the Arabic terms *Istiṣrākh* and *Istighātha* is a “call for help” or “appeal for aid” in times of distress or trouble. The corresponding Hebrew term, *ze’āqā*, is already attested in the Bible and is often addressed to God, see Psalms 142:2: “I cry aloud to the LORD; I appeal to the LORD loudly for mercy” or 1 Chronicles 5:20: “for they cried to God in the battle, and He responded to their entreaty because they trusted in Him.”

³ For good examples of comparative studies of Arabic/Hebrew Poetry, see Alexander Elinson: *Looking Back at al-Andalus. The Poetics of Loss and Nostalgia in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Literature*, Leiden 2009; Arie Schippers: *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition. Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry*, Leiden 1994; Yosef Tobi: *Proximity and Distance. Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Poetry*, Leiden 2004; Yosef Tobi: *Between Hebrew and Arabic Poetry. Studies in Spanish Medieval Hebrew Poetry*, Leiden 2010. See also Abdallah Tarabieh’s previous publications: *Nostalgia and Elegy for Cities in the Andalusian Arabic and Hebrew Poetry* [in Hebrew], Bāqa al-Gharbiyya 2015; Abdallah Tarabieh: *The Genre of Istiṣrākh/Istighātha in Spanish Arabic and Hebrew Poetry of the Eleventh-Twelfth Centuries* [in Hebrew], in: Yosef Tobi (ed.), *Ben ‘Ever la-‘Arav*, vol. 5, Bāqa al-Gharbiyya 2012, pp. 94–107; Nader Masarwah/ Abdallah Tarabieh: *Longing for Granada in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetry*, in: *al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean*, 26/3 (2014), pp. 299–318. See also the recent dissertation by Anan Habeeb: *Nostalgia and the East in the Arabic and Hebrew Poetry of Islamic Spain*, Ph.D. Indiana University 2015.

⁴ Ibn Ḥamdīs was forced to flee to Muslim Spain after his native town in Sicily was captured by the Normans; he later wandered on to North Africa and Mallorca, where he died. Moses ibn Ezra spent the second half of his life in exile in Christian Spain following the capture of his hometown Granada in Muslim Spain by the Almoravids.

Throughout the article, we must bear in mind the broader context of the unprecedented social, cultural and literary exchange between the distinct religious groups living in Andalusia in a period commonly referred to as the peaceful age of *convivencia* (“coexistence”).⁵ We will also have to take into account the impact of exile and wandering on the profusion of the theme “calling for help and redemption” as well as the related theme of “yearning for one’s homeland” known in Arabic as *al-ḥanīn ilā-l-awṭān*, through an analysis and comparison of poetic fragments by the two aforementioned poets and additional Andalusian Jewish (Judah ha-Levi) and Muslim (Ibn Khafāja, al-Rundi and Ibn al-Abbār) poets. It is indeed impossible to examine the “calling for help and redemption” theme without clarifying the relationship between the poet and (the natural attachment to) his *waṭan* or “homeland”. This feeling of longing for the homeland seems to have been particularly intense amongst exiled or itinerant poets, who in some cases were inspired to compose city laments (Arabic: *rithā’ al-mudun* – see below) or calls for unity and salvation from the enemy, and cries for help and redemption.

2. Arabic Poetry

The topic of “calling for help” first made its appearance in pre-Islamic poetry in the Arabian Peninsula. Pre-Islamic poets, such as the famous sixth-century poet Imrū’ al-Qays – in his celebrated poem with the incipit: “Halt, my two friends, let us weep over the remembrance of a beloved” – expressed the pain and suffering, stemming primarily from the separation from their beloved ones, which accompanied their tribal life in the Arabian Peninsula. In the prelude to their *qaṣīdas*, these wandering poets in the late fifth to the early seventh century wept over abandoned campsites in the desert, and thus disclosed strong feelings about their loneliness and the distance of the journey across the desert. In laments written to commemorate cities destroyed during tribal warfare, these poets, who lived during the period before the establishment of Islam, summoned up support for their allies and uttered appeals for aid against their enemy.⁶

⁵ For challenges to the notion of an age of *convivencia*, see David Nirenberg: *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, Princeton 1996, pp. 8–9.

⁶ It is interesting to note that the Koran contains a certain amount of relevant passages using the Arabic roots at the basis of the terms *Istīṣrākh*/*Istighātha*, see *Sūrat Ibrāhīm* (*Sūra* 14:22): “I [i.e., Satan] cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid”; *Sūrat al-Qiṣaṣ*

The first signs of *Istiṣrākh/Istighātha* as an independent theme became visible in the Muslim East in the ninth century; it started with the civil war – known as the Fourth Fitna – between the half-brothers al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn over the succession to their father Harūn al-Rashīd's Abbasid Caliphate's throne. After a short stint in power, al-Amīn was deposed and killed in 813 and succeeded by his half-brother al-Ma'mūn, who reigned until his death in 833 and was, in turn, succeeded by another half-brother, al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833–842). On the occasion of the conquest of Amorium in 838, the latter caliph was praised in Abū Tammām's famous *qaṣīda* with the incipit *al-sayfu aṣḍaḍu anba'an min al-kutubi* – “the sword is more veracious than the book”. In line 46, the poet refers to a woman from Zibatra who called out for help from the caliph after Byzantium seized her hometown.⁷

In the latter half of that century, another period of extreme instability, to be exact the Zanj rebellion involving Black African slaves, which took place near the city of Basra in present-day Southern Iraq and among whose victims were also local women, is referred to in the following poetic lines (67–68) by Ibn Al-Rūmī (836–896) in his “Elegy on Basra”, quoted here from Arthur John Arberry's English translation:

“My community! Where were you, when there called upon you a free woman, of the noble women of the people? / O Muhammad, she shrieked, and why did there not rise up on her behalf the guardians of my right in my stead?”

Interestingly, the second line includes the word *ṣarakhat*, “she shrieked,” in the original Arabic poem.⁸

In Muslim Spain, the theme of *Istiṣrākh/Istighātha* reached its peak and was thus integrated in the framework of particular poems belonging to the

(*Sūra* 28:18): “when suddenly the one who sought his help the previous day cried out to him [once again]”; *Sūrat al-Anfāl* (*Sūra* 8:9): “[remember] when you asked help of your Lord, and He answered you.”

⁷ On this Arabic poem, see Arthur John Arberry: *Arabic Poetry. A Primer for Students*, Cambridge 1965, pp.50–63 (particularly p.58, line 46: “You replied to (the call of) a Zibatrian voice”); Mustafā Badawī: *The Function of Rhetoric in Medieval Arabic Poetry: Abū Tammām's Ode on Amorium*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 9 (1978), pp.43–56.

⁸ Ibn Al-Rūmī: *Dīwān*, 6:135; Azzūz Zarqān: *The Poetry of Crying for Help in Andalusia [in Arabic]*, Beirut 2008, p.32 (this book constitutes the most wide-ranging analysis of the *Istiṣrākh/Istighātha* theme in Andalusian Arabic poetry); Arberry, *Arabic Poetry*, pp.70–71. See on this poet Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition*, pp.218–219; Beatrice Gruendler: *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry. Ibn al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption*, London 2003.

genre of city elegies (Arabic: *rithā' al-mudun*); that is, laments written in the wake of the fall of Andalusian cities to Berber factions or to Christian conquerors in the eventful *Taifa* period of the eleventh century as well as in the time of the Almoravid (late-eleventh century) and Almohad (twelfth-century) invasions. The early beginnings of this genre seem to go back to the Abbasid period (see for example the aforementioned “Elegy on Basra” by Ibn Al-Rūmī) but it came to maturity only during the period of civil war known as the “Fitna of al-Andalus” (1009–1031), which led to the 1013 siege of Córdoba and the ultimate collapse of the *Khilāfat Qurṭuba* in 1031; it consequently disintegrated into a number of independent *Taifa* kingdoms. The Caliphate of Córdoba’s collapse was not only deplored by historians like Ibn Hayyan al-Qurṭubī (987–1075), whose oeuvre is an important source for reconstructing the history of the Umayyad Caliphate and the *Taifa* period⁹, but also by poets like Ibn Shuhayd (992–1035) in his “Elegy on Córdoba”.¹⁰ Besides Córdoba the list of lamented Andalusian cities is long and includes among others Bobastro, Granada, Seville, Toledo and Valencia.¹¹

In city elegies, the Arabic poets expressed a collective sense of grief over the destruction of their communities and cried out their own feelings of loss and longing following the abandonment of their homeland and their life in exile. In some examples, this was accompanied by calls for unity and salvation from and revenge against their enemy. For Ibn Ḥamdīs, this enemy corresponded in the first place to the Normans who invaded his homeland Sicily while he was still a young poet. Consequently, he was forced to spend the rest of his life wandering through Andalusia and North Africa in search of poetry-loving patrons. In many of his poems, Ibn Ḥamdīs lamented the loss

⁹ For more on this historical period, see Hugh Kennedy: *Muslim Spain and Portugal. A Political History of al-Andalus*, London and New York 1996, pp. 109–130; David Wasserstein: *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings. Politics and Society in Islamic Spain 1002–1086*, Princeton 1985. Excerpts from Ibn Hayyan’s works were inserted by the poet and literary historian Ibn Bassām (d. 1147) in his important anthology *Kitāb al-dhakhira fi maḥāsin ahl al-jazīra* (Ihsan Abbas (ed.): *The Treasury of Excellent Qualities of the People of the Peninsula*, Beirut 1979).

¹⁰ The “Elegy on Córdoba” is translated and analyzed, along with other examples of *rithā' al-mudun* or city elegies, in Elinson, *Looking Back at al-Andalus*, pp. 15–49 (especially pp. 38–49).

¹¹ Cf. the most comprehensive anthology of Arabic city elegies by Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Zayyāt: *City Elegies in Andalusian Poetry* [in Arabic], Benghazi 1990. Al-Zayyāt distinguishes between two categories fallen cities: a) cities which fell due to inner Muslim strife (Córdoba); and b) cities which fell to Christian powers (Bobastro, Granada, Seville, Toledo and Valencia).

of his home in Syracuse and the downfall of the Islamic culture in Sicily. Let us consider the following selection of lines from poem nr. 270 of his poetic collection, in which the use of imperative forms reinforces the poet's appeals to the inhabitants of Syracuse to wake up from their sleep and try to resist the invading Normans and avoid exile before it is too late:¹²

[2]: Call up from sleep, for I am afraid that calamities will overtake you while you are feeling safe in your dream.

[4]: Drive back the horses' faces, which express a wish for bereavement and orphanhood, in the direction of disaster.

[22]: Chain yourself to the country which is your beloved homeland, and die among your own tribe in your territory or its ruins.

[23]: Make sure never to experience exile, insofar as the mind refuses to try out poison.

A similar combination of motifs (consisting of a wake-up call, battle-imagery, and love for the homeland) can be found in a poem by the later Andalusian poet Abū Baqā' al-Rundī (1204–1285), whose lament for the fall of Seville was a call for (military) support directed at the Muslims in North Africa to help overcome the Christian armies. Let us take lines 25–32 as an example, quoted here from J. T. Monroe's English translation.¹³ Note that the final line opens with the Arabic words *kam yastaghīthu binā* – “how often have [the weak] asked for our help?” – in the original poem:

O you who remain heedless though you have a warning in Fate: if you are asleep,
Fate is always awake!

And you who walk forth cheerfully while your homeland diverts you [from cares],
can a homeland beguile any man after [the loss of] Seville?

This misfortune has caused those that preceded it to be forgotten, nor can it ever be
forgotten for the length of all time!

O you who ride lean, thoroughbred steeds which seem like eagles in the racecourse;

¹² Ibn Ḥamdīs: *Dīwān*. Ed. Ihsan Abbas, Beirut 1960, pp. 416–417 (poem nr. 270, lines nr. 2, 4, and 22–23). For the English translation of lines 22–23, see William Granara: *Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetry of Nostalgia*, in: Raymond P. Scheindlin / Michael Sells / Maria Rosa Menocal (ed.), *The Literature of al-Andalus*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 388–403 (particularly p. 389); William Granara: *Remaking Muslim Sicily: Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetics of Exile*, in: *Edebiyat*, 9/2 (1998), pp. 167–198.

¹³ James T. Monroe: *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: A Student Anthology*, Berkeley 1974; Piscataway 2004, pp. 332–336.

And you who carry slander, Indian blades which seem like fires in the darkness
caused by the dust cloud [of war],

And you who are living in luxury beyond the sea enjoying life, you who have
strength and power in your homelands,

Have you no news of the people of Andalusia, for riders have carried forth what
men have said [about them]?

How often have the weak, who were being killed and captured while no man stirred,
asked our help?

Another famous *qaṣīda* is a lament which the Andalusian poet Ibn al-Abbār (1199–1260) addressed to the Tunisian sultan following the fall of Valencia, in which he calls for help against the Christian forces of King James I the Conqueror. The first three lines go as follows:¹⁴

Start with your riders, God's riders, for Andalusia: the road to its salvation is
concealed now!

Give it the mighty help it expects, because powerful succor from you is still its
hope!

Free it from what her tender soul has had to undergo: for a long time it has been
suffering a ceaseless pain!

Like Ibn Ḥamdīs, al-Rundī and Ibn al-Abbār in the previous examples, Ibn Khafāja (1058–1138/9) – who spent most of his life near Valencia under Almoravid rule, but had to escape temporarily to North Africa around 1100 – used the language and imagery known from the tradition of (pre-Islamic) Arabic battle poetry, as seen in the following line which describes war as the only means of cleansing a city defiled by the enemy: “By means of the sword, cleanse the city of its impurity, this washing is only possible with the liquid of the sword (= blood).”¹⁵ Besides battle-imagery, Ibn Khafāja and the other poets – especially Ibn Ḥamdīs in his *ṣiqillīyyāt* (“Sicilian poems”) – also drew heavily on the long-established theme of “yearning for one’s homeland,” known in Arabic as *al-ḥanīn ilā-l-awṭān*, by means of which the poets express

¹⁴ For more on Ibn al-Abbār including the translation of these lines, see Alois R. Nykl: *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours*, Baltimore 1946, pp. 332–333.

¹⁵ Ibn Khafāja: *Diwān*. Ed. Karam al-Bustani, Beirut 1961, p. 219. For more on Ibn Khafāja, see *Arie Schippers/John Mattock*: *Love and War: A Poem of Ibn Khafajah*, in: *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 17 (1986), pp. 50–68; Magda al-Nowaihi: *The Poetry of Ibn Khafajah. A Literary Analysis*, Leiden 1993.

the longing for the physical places they were born or grew up in. For Ibn Khafāja, this homeland was Valencia or the Iberian Peninsula more generally: “Could there be a return to the land of the Peninsula, which calms the soul and is a peaceful dwelling?”¹⁶ For Ibn Ḥamdīs, on the other hand, this place was Syracuse or Sicily in general; he also reproaches those who have adapted to their place of exile (in his case Andalusia and North Africa) in his writing: “The land of others is not your land, nor are its friends and neighbors yours. Can the land of another replace your land? Can a milkless aunt take the place of a mother?”¹⁷

3. Hebrew Poetry

The corpus of Hebrew poetry composed in medieval Spain is widely regarded as representing one of the most important chapters in the lengthy history of Hebrew literature. The first beginnings date back to the tenth century when Córdoba was the capital of the Ummayyad Caliphate bearing the city’s name. Spanish Hebrew poetry reached its peak only in the eleventh-twelfth centuries in the Muslim city-states of the *Taifa* period and the time of the Almoravid and Almohad invasions. The poetic corpus would steadily grow until the expulsion of the Jews from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century.¹⁸

One of the most significant innovations by Spanish Jewish poets was that alongside traditional liturgical poetry, they also began to compose secular poems that were intended neither for study nor for use in the prayer ritual. This new type of Hebrew secular poetry soon provided the impetus for the crystallization of a new kind of Hebrew liturgical poetry written in innovative poetic forms and characterized by stylistic and thematic changes, as a result of which it is difficult to determine the exact boundaries between

¹⁶ Ibn Khafāja, *Diwān*, p. 160.

¹⁷ Ibn Ḥamdīs, *Diwān*, pp. 416–417 (poem nr. 270; lines nr. 19–20). For the English translation, see Granara, *Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetry of Nostalgia*, p. 389.

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning the elegies composed in the wake of persecutions suffered by Spanish Jewish communities in the century prior to their expulsion in 1492. See Wout van Bekkum: O Seville! Ah Castile! Spanish-Hebrew dirges from the fifteenth century, in: Nicholas de Lange (ed.), *Hebrew scholarship and the medieval world*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 156–170; Wout van Bekkum/Joseph Yahalom: Come back into the fold, my beloved one, a fifteenth-century Hebrew dirge on the fate of Spanish Jewry, in: *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, 36 (2010), pp. 69–83. See also the third volume of the journal *Iberia Judaica* (2011) devoted to the topic of “Las persecuciones de 1391 en las elegías hebreas / The Persecutions of 1391 in the Hebrew Elegies.”

“secular / non-liturgical” and “liturgical” poetry.¹⁹ Indeed, while most Spanish Jewish poets wrote both secular and liturgical poetry, they also composed a significant corpus of poems with religious content devoid of any liturgical function. It is not easy to formally, stylistically and thematically differentiate such works from liturgical compositions. Let us take the poetic oeuvre of the famous Spanish poet and literary critic Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1138) as an example. On the one hand, he wrote liturgical poems containing typical laments on Israel’s current suffering in exile followed by expressions of hope for redemption from exile and the realization of the divine promise concerning the people of Israel. On the other hand, he wrote more personal, “secular” complaints about his personal exile in Christian Spain – which was a different cultural and linguistic environment from what he was used to in his hometown Granada in Muslim Spain – during the second part of his life as a result of the Almoravid invasions.²⁰

In any case, several of his poems share a dream of physical and spiritual redemption from exile. Let us take the *seliḥa* with the incipit *yonat elem reḥoqim* as the first example from his liturgical oeuvre.²¹ In the opening two strophes, Israel is conventionally depicted as an unfortunate dove driven out

¹⁹ According to Ezra Fleischer, the boundaries between “secular” and “liturgical” poetry were not boundaries of poetic form, but only of poetic function or designation. See: Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages [in Hebrew], Jerusalem 1975, p. 335. Ephraim Hazan discussed the difficulties in determining the exact boundaries between liturgical poems and poems with religious content but no liturgical function in: The Poetics of the Sephardi Piyut According to the Liturgical Poetry of Yehuda Halevi [in Hebrew], Jerusalem 1986, pp. 15–23. According to Raymond Scheindlin, it is important to limit the use of the word “secular” for non-liturgical poetry: Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judeo-Arab Culture in the Golden Age of Islam, in: David Biale (ed.), Cultures of the Jews. A New History, New York 2002, p. 384; cf. The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel and the Soul, Philadelphia 1991, pp. 18–25.

²⁰ See e.g. the first three lines in the *qaṣida* with the incipit *ad meh be-garon hoṣhkim yiqra’u*, translated and analyzed in Elinson, Looking Back at al-Andalus, pp. 104–115 (especially pp. 111–113): “How long will lovers cry out in vain to the ears of campsites that are ruined? / In not hearing, they are like the deaf, or are they like the dumb, unable to answer their cries? / They stand crying, for their inhabitants are the head of exiles, according to the vicissitudes of fate.” Cf. Josef Dana: The Poetics of Sephardic Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages (in light of the Poetry and Poetics of Rabbi Moses ibn Ezra) [in Hebrew], Haifa 1999, pp. 10–11; Dan Pagis: Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory: Moses ibn Ezra and his Contemporaries [in Hebrew], Jerusalem 1970. Moses ibn Ezra’s secular poetry was edited by Hayyim Brody and originally published in Germany by Schocken Verlag (Berlin 1935). Moses ibn Ezra’s liturgical poetry was edited by Shimeon Bernstein (Tel Aviv 1956) and more recently by Israel Levin and Tova Rosen in two volumes (Tel Aviv 2012–2014).

²¹ Ed. Bernstein, 1956, p. 19; ed. Levin and Rosen, vol. 2, p. 465.

of its nest. The penultimate strophe of this poem, however, contains striking cries for help and redemption:

I cried for help from *a waterless pit* (Genesis 37:24) in which I had sunk,
 I called out and *I lifted up my heart with my hands* (Lamentations 3:41),
 I clapped and I came early to the gates of heaven –
 if only *the Creator of the fruit of lips* (Isaiah 57:19) would listen to my words
 and then *my enemy would see it, she would be covered with shame* (Micah 7:10).

While Moses ibn Ezra composed several other *seliḥot* or penitential hymns – as a result of which he is sometimes given the title *ha-sallah* (“the one who asks forgiveness” or “the composer of many *seliḥot*”) – we should bear in mind that he also wrote “secular” complaints about his own personal exile in Christian Spain; see, for example, the poem with the incipit *yom ha-nedod ha-mar ve-ha-nimhar*, quoted here from Peter Cole’s English translation:²²

That rash and bitter day of departure left me drunk with the wine of desire;
 Desolate now, I dwell among mules, where no one sees to the needs of my soul;
 I call to the left – no answer, then turn to the right and find – only strangers.

To be sure, such a fairly personal tone (reinforced grammatically by the use of the first person) can also be detected in several of his liturgical poems, as the following strophes from the poem with the incipit *shiru/shoreru yalde emunay* may illustrate:²³

Listen to the outcry of someone who implores You to appear,
 make a wind of forgiveness blow,
 subdue the enemy *who intends me harm* (Gen 50:20)
 for *You are the Holy One, enthroned, the Praise [of Israel]* (Ps 22:4).

Will You forever forsake a poor, trembling,
 hoping, fragile [people], in custody among lions?
 Until when will *the Valley of Vision* (Isa 22:1,5) be inhabited by wild asses
 and desolate, and how long will *Zion’s roads be in mourning* (Lam 1:4)?

²² Moses ibn Ezra: *Shirei ha-ḥol*. Ed. Brody, p. 102 (poem 101); Peter Cole: *The Dream of the Poem. Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950–1492*, Princeton 2007, p. 127. For more on ibn Ezra’s exile poems, see Arie Schippers: *Two Andalusian Poets on Exile: Reflections on the Poetry of Ibn Ammār (1031–1086) and Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1138)*, in: *The Challenge of the Middle East: Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Amsterdam*, Amsterdam 1982, pp. 113–121.

²³ Ed. Bernstein, pp. 3–4; ed. Levin and Rosen, vol. 2, pp. 494–496.

My foes have set my bones on fire
 and they have raised their voice against me without cessation,
 my enemies have furiously removed the fence of my vineyard
 and they have gathered the vintage but left no gleanings (Jer 49:9).

In these strophes, the poet combines a cry for help with an emphasis on the difficult circumstances in which he – speaking more generally in the name of the people of Israel – is living in exile. The description of the suffering inflicted upon Israel by the enemies somewhat calls to mind the style of Arabic and Hebrew Andalusian war poems; for instance, the comparison of the enemies to lions. Not surprisingly, this suffering thus triggers a call for revenge in the poem's final lines (25–26): “*Pay back its neighbours sevenfold, O Lord* (Psalms 79:12), for *He is a God of requital* (Jeremiah 51:56).”

Another example, which is reminiscent of the wake-up calls from exile as discussed in the preceding Arabic secular poems, is the third strophe of Moses ibn Ezra's *seliḥa* with the incipit *qara'ti mi-ṣarah*, quoted here from Esperanza Alfonso's English translation:²⁴

The one who dwells in exile, awake! His sleep has been too long,
 (spent) in hard labour in the hands of Se'ir (Christians) and Ishmael (Muslims).
 When will the elder and maidservant's son (Ishmael) serve the younger (Isaac)?
 When will You take *one from a town and two from a clan (and bring them to Zion)*
 (Jeremiah 3:14)?

The suffering from the exile also occupied various other Spanish Jewish poets and this was reflected in their belief that there is no substitute for the homeland. There is a notable difference, however, between Judah ha-Levi (c. 1075–1141) and between Moses ibn Ezra or the Arabic poets highlighted in this article. Judah ha-Levi was born in Toledo in Christian Spain but also lived for some time in Muslim Spain, before he abandoned the Iberian Peninsula altogether at the end of his life and temporarily joined Egyptian Jews on his pilgrimage to Palestine. In other words, Judah ha-Levi – at least during the latter part of his life – was primarily passionate for the land of his forefathers, that is, the land of Israel. In contrast, just like Ibn Khafāja's love for Valencia or Ibn Ḥamdīs's devotion to Syracuse, Moses ibn Ezra longed for the physical

²⁴ Ed. Bernstein, p. 162; ed. Levin and Rosen, vol. 2, pp. 199–201; Esperanza Alfonso: *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes*, New York 2008, p. 71.

place where he grew up, to be exact: Granada (or Andalusia more generally). This secular nostalgia for his homeland or *al-ḥanīn ilā-l-awṭān* is skillfully expressed by Moses ibn Ezra in the following lines: “[Once] the days of my life were satiated with the honeycomb of love, intoxicated with the wine of youth only, in a land more pleasant than all other lands, its inhabitants created according to their will”.²⁵

To be sure, as Esperanza Alfonso has shown,

“while in his liturgical poems [Moses] Ibn Ezra longs for Zion, in his secular poetry he longs for Granada, where he eventually returns in his dreams. Although separated by genre, these two senses of longing are not mutually exclusive. Ibn Ezra describes his exile from Granada in secular poetry through biblical references and images commonly used to characterize the communal exile from Zion.”

Alfonso gives the following lines as an example of such blurring of the boundaries between secular and liturgical poetry:²⁶

If God would let me return to Hadar Rimmon (Granada), how pleasant my path would be!

I would drink and sate with the water of the Shenir (Genil), pure, even when the delightful streams (Psalms 36:9) come turbid.

A land where my life was sweet and Time gracious to me.

I will await God as nothing prevents Him from announcing Liberation and freedom to him whom Separation made prisoner.

In contrast to Moses ibn Ezra, who in this particular example understands redemption as a return to his home in Granada, Judah ha-Levi longed for Zion or the Holy Land not only in his liturgical works but also in several of his secular poems. These include both his so-called “Zionides”, which were originally not intended to be part of the liturgy, as well as the poems written during his pilgrimage to Palestine, which he is known to have undertaken during the latter part of his life, possibly as a result of his estrangement from

²⁵ Moses ibn Ezra: *Shirei ha-ḥol*. Ed. Brody, p. 19 (poem 13; lines 16–17). For the English translation of these lines, see Jonathan Decter: *Iberian Jewish Literature. Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2007, p. 41.

²⁶ Moses ibn Ezra: *Shirei ha-ḥol*. Ed. Brody, p. 67 (poem 67; lines 31–34); Alfonso, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes*, p. 76.

the Andalusian courtly culture. Undoubtedly his most well-known poem to Zion goes as follows:²⁷

My heart is in the East – and I am at the edge of the West.
How can I possibly taste what I eat? How could it please me?
How can I keep my promise or ever fulfill my vow,
when Zion is held by Edom and I am bound by Arabia’s chains?
I’d gladly leave behind me all the pleasures of Spain –
if only I might see the dust and the ruins of your Shrine.

According to Raymond Scheindlin, this poem “seems to mark a turn in ha-Levi’s inner life: the moment when he definitively stopped pinning his hopes on a speedy messianic return to the East and replaced this hope with a private dream of his individual return”.²⁸ Whereas Judah ha-Levi vowed to abandon Spain and head for Jerusalem, which he eventually achieved, the other poets highlighted in this article, particularly Ibn Ḥamdīs and Moses ibn Ezra, would keep longing for their respective homelands without ever realizing their dreams of returning home from their exile.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it needs to be stressed again that this article does not represent a complete comparative study of the development of the “calling for help” or “yearning for one’s homeland” themes in Arabic and Hebrew poetry, and that more research is needed in order to fully reconstruct the transfer of motifs and themes that took place between Arabic and Hebrew poetry. Moreover, one should not ignore some striking differences between these two poetries, such as the fact that the addressees in Arabic secular poems are, in general, human beings whereas the main addressee in Hebrew liturgical poems is God. This being said, the impulse behind the calls for help and redemption and the nostalgic feelings of Jews and Muslims seem to have been equivalent in the two poetries, namely, the suffering experienced in exile as a result of political and social instability and the displacement from one’s homeland.

²⁷ Hayyim Schirmann: *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and the Provence* [in Hebrew], vol. 2, Jerusalem 1954, p. 489 (poem 208:2); quoted from Peter Cole’s English translation in *The Dream of the Poem*, p. 164.

²⁸ Raymond Scheindlin: *The Song of the Distant Dove. Judah Halevi’s Pilgrimage*, Oxford 2008, p. 171; Scheindlin also provided a fine translation of this poem on p. 169.