Fantasy and the Rhetoric of Mimesis in Early Medieval Hebrew Literature

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Introduction

Medieval Hebrew literary texts were generally written in a linguistic register heavily inflected with scriptural references, in the form both of direct quotation and of glancing allusion. Golden Age poetry, in particular, strove to approximate both the vocabulary and the grammar of its biblical model. In both poetry and prose, an allusion, however brief, could draw in its wake a host of contextual echoes related to the scriptural setting being appealed to. In turn, for the learned reader (or listener), these same background echoes would intensify the power of the text that invoked them, enriching its conceptual depth. But the language, however beautiful and ingeniously adaptive, was also artificial—not what we would consider a living, spoken tongue. And the more literary the text, the more artificial the Hebrew. An author, therefore, who sought instead to convey a representation of reality would have to make an extraordinary effort to do so. Even an author whose main purpose is *not* the recounting of real-life events needs to ground his account sufficiently that his actual purpose—polemical, moral, comic, and so on—can be fulfilled. Any attempt at mimetic representation of actual events had to reckon with the layered character of a literary idiom that brought with it biblical images, characters, even an entire landscape. The use of that idiom already suggested a level of distance from reality—even a break from it.[1] A narrative written in medieval literary Hebrew thus constructs, in some sense, an imaginary world in which references to biblical landscape and biblical characters fold into or are imposed upon the story in more or less opaque ways.

The maqāma is a form that developed in Arabic and then moved to Hebrew. In Arabic literary culture and in the Hebrew form of what is now called the "classical maqāma," it has a very specific, rather narrow definition. In later Hebrew literature, by contrast, the term is applied by scholars to a very wide range of narrative texts united mainly by the fact of their being written in Hebrew rhymed prose interspersed with poetry. Poems were both rhymed and metered according to the quantitative metrics drawn from Arabic prosody, but rhymed prose (*saj'*) was an elevated form of prose, used sometimes at the formal beginning of a letter, for example, and consisted of unmetered phrases that rhyme at the end of each phrase, in groups of two or three or four (or more). A better term is the more inclusive "medieval Hebrew rhymed prose narrative," but in the interests of space I will use maqāma.[2] A primary characteristic of most—but not all—of these texts is fictionality.[3] In the Hebrew tradition of maqāmas stemming from al-Andalus, fictionality is so much a part of the genre that authors play on it and with it, inserting real characters—and themselves as the authors—into the narrative. In the East, on the other hand, Hebrew maqāmas did not so closely identify the standard format—that is, rhymed prose plus interspersed poems—with a fictional narrative.[4]

And here a difference between Arabic and Hebrew comes into play. In the Islamic world, Arabic, as the language of daily life, mapped easily onto realistic descriptions of everyday existence. Letters both private and public provided accounts of real events, both first-person narratives of personal experience and third-person narratives constituting, in effect, "news reports." Such letters—mainly in Arabic but sometimes also in Hebrew—were sent from Yemen to Alexandria, from Cairo to Sicily, from Jerusalem to Akko, serving to keep people up to date with the health and wellbeing of their loved ones and relatives, to inform merchants of the status of their consignments and the circumstances of their agents, to report events of particular Jewish interest such as clashes with the government or other local calamities, and so on. To pick a homely example: a Jew writing his mother to let her know how he was doing and to give her all the news of recent events would naturally use Arabic, not just because his mother might not have an active knowledge of Hebrew but because Hebrew was reserved for other purposes and other forms of communication. As Ben Outhwaite has written: "The international language of trade was Arabic, and Hebrew, in many cases, was deficient in the necessary vocabulary for the expanding world of commerce.

Moreover, commercial correspondence is a more transparent form of writing, and seeks to convey information with the minimum of artistry. … Arabic was a transparent medium of communication whereas Hebrew was an opaque medium of a predominantly literary-aesthetic character."[5] Indeed, Rina Drory has described how the Arabic maqāma draws on the socio-cultural background of "real life" in order to amuse and entertain the reader, while the Hebrew maqāma delights the reader with sophisticated intertextual allusions to the Hebrew Bible and clever word play.[6] As we will see, however, some medieval authors did attempt to deploy Hebrew to depict real events, and did so even in highly literary settings.

What does any of this have to do with fantasy? John Clute has noted that "almost any form of tale written before the rise of the mimetic novel could be retroactively conceived as ur- or proto-fantasy."[7] This is useful but should be qualified, if not reformulated. After all, the question of what can be categorized as fantasy only really arises if there is something in it that can be categorized as non-fantasy—as something that in fact is already, to some degree, mimetic.

With that in mind, in what follows I will first consider the early medieval megillah (scroll), a genre used for some historical narratives[8]; in particular, I wish to focus on the genre conventions employed to convey that a text is recounting historical events more or less faithfully. (As it happens, in instances where those conventions are clear enough, biblical quotation and allusion can be used to great effect without taking away from the historicity of the narrative.) I will then turn to three examples of "autobiographical" Hebrew maqamas from the late twelfth century, in each of which the author, in the maqāma format of rhymed prose interspersed with poetry, composes the story of his (early) life or some particular events. And then in somewhat greater depth I will turn to *Sefer sha'ashu'im*, a twelfth-century frame-tale and proto-novel by Joseph ibn Zabara, also written in rhymed prose with poems, that plays with realism and fictionality in illuminating ways.[9] Working within a genre known to be fictional, Ibn Zabara explicitly presents his story as one that actually happened. He is both author and narrator, carefully re-orienting his narrative away from the accepted fictional structure to dissolve the boundaries between real life and his tale. He thus tells of events that *could not* have happened, but he does so in terms that suggest that, in fact, they did. This article thus aims to consider the ways in which some early medieval Hebrew authors set about writing "realistic" narrative and, ultimately, how their accumulated rhetorical strategies could be deployed in a fictional tale to create a species of literature that can be legitimately included in the category of fantasy.

The megillah

As it emerged in the early medieval period, the megillah, or scroll, was a narrative of personal deeds or historical events presented not as fiction but as things that actually happened. Many of these scrolls are modeled on the book of Esther in commemorating a set of events that show God's favor to the Jews. An annual public reading of the scroll, again following the biblical model of the book of Esther, is often assumed; some genizah fragments have been found written with vowels and cantillation marks for this purpose.

Some examples:

Megilat Antiochus, dating probably from the eighth or ninth century, tells the story of the Greek Seleucid king Antiochus IV, whose persecution of the Jews of Judea led to the Hasmonean revolt—i.e., the rebellion led by Mattiathias and his sons.[10] The scroll, originally written in Aramaic but then translated into Hebrew, as well into as many other languages, recounts the story of the rebellion and the establishment of the Hasmonean kingdom, including the rebuilding of the Temple, the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days, and the institution of Hanukkah in commemoration. In some medieval Jewish communities, it was read ceremonially during Hanukkah.[11] It is a third-person account, beginning "And it came to pass in the days of Antiochas, king of Yavan. He was a mighty and powerful king, and potent in his realm, and all the kings obeyed him. He conquered many countries, and powerful kings he bound in

fetters; he destroyed their castles, burned their palaces with fire, and bound their inhabitants (valiant men) in fetters. He built a mighty town close to the shore of the sea, which should be for him the residential house, and he called it Antochia after his own name."[12]

The Book of the Calendar Controversy, a tenth-century work published recently, with translation, by Sacha Stern, was similarly intended for annual recitation in public. It describes the events of a controversy over the Jewish calendar in 921/2, depicting one of the protagonists, known as Ben Meir, in slightly overwrought Hebrew: "[Ben Meir] arose and wrought destruction like a treacherous bow and foul grapes, by means of his position, his loftiness, and documents from the ruler. And the people's mouths were silenced from objecting to him. Then he grew a root bearing poison weed (Deut. 29:17), and he became a sword in the land to consume its poor (cf. Prov. 30:14), to cover with anger anyone exultant and haughty, and to silence anyone wise and truth-loving." The text itself is explicitly said to be a "memorandum" for the people.

> Therefore, we commanded the heads, leaders, sages and teachers to assemble, and we took counsel on what to do about this great stumbling-block which ben Meir had brought in support of his scheme; and they said: We will not be able to destroy all the copies which ben Meir wrote on this (and which he sent) to all the places; and furthermore, it is possible that his letters have been copied among the people; but it is fit to write this book, for it to be a memorandum among all Israel, to inform them of this deed of ben Meir from beginning to end, and to move them away and warn them.[13]

Samuel ha-Shelishi's *Megilat Mitzrayim* (ca. 1013) is the story of attacks on the Jewish community of Fustat ("Egypt"), ending with the institution of an annual fast day—on which, presumably, the scroll would be recited aloud—and a call for moral uprightness.[14]

Megilat Ahima'atz, completed in 1054, collects numerous stories taking place over a number of years and involving members of the same family.[15]

Megilat Evyatar written in 1094, by Evyatar ben Elijah ha-Kohen, recounts the struggles between one Daniel ben Azaryah (d. 1062) and then his son and members of Evyatar's family over the geonate, with events taking place in Jerusalem and then Tyre and Fustat. The account has been carefully analyzed for what it can tell of the institution of the gaonate as well as of the events themselves; all agree it is a highly polemical account, exaggerating or reworking certain details for the purposes of the author, but the rough outline of events correspond to a power struggle that took place of the course of many years.[16]

Megilat Ovadiah ha-Ger (b. ca. 1070) is an autobiographical account of the famous proselyte, not extant in full. It tells the story in third-person:

> Then came [Obadiah the Proselyte] unto the city of Adinah which is Baghdad, [capital of the Ishma]elites. The servant installed Obadiah the Proselyte in the house wherein the Jews would pray, and they brought him provisions. It happened thereafter that Isaac, the head of the academy, directed that Obadiah the Proselyte be with the orphan youths, in order to teach him the Torah of Moses and the words of the prophets in the script of the Lord and the language of the Hebrews. Prior to this, the king of Adinah, whose name was al-Muqtadi, empowered his second-in-command, whose name was Abishuga (=Ibn Shuja), to take discriminatory action against the Hebrews dwelling in the city of Adinah. He sought many times to cause them to perish, but the God of Israel thwarted his intent, this time also hiding them from his wrath….[17]

Abraham ben Hillel's 1196 *Megilat Zuta*, written in rhymed prose, is a satirical account of the maneuverings to purchase the office of *nagid* (communal leader) on the part of a man referred to by the author as "Zuta"; the author calls his text a *mazkeret* ("memorial") of Zuta's evil deeds: "My intention is that this letter (*iggeret*) should be a memorial of the sins of Zuta, written beautifully in a book (*sefer*) with

a pen of iron and lead." It too is a third person account of events: "And it was, early on in the days of the kingdom of Armon [Armenia], that there was a king who loved money…" [18]

In his scholarly analysis of this genre, Zvi Malachi summarizes some of its key characteristics. First, the megillah tells a circumscribed story of a single main character and a handful of secondary ones. Next, whether structured as a single story (of, for example, one individual or one Jewish community) or as a sequential series of stories (associated, for example, with a single family), these narratives feature fast-moving plots and dramatic conflicts. The events, moreover, are described artfully, including with liberal use of scriptural allusions. Finally, the works are not written as purely historical accounts but are apologetic, polemical, and usually intent on positing the workings of a kind of divine plan. All of these aspects, Malachi notes, and especially the last, elevate the megillah form to the level of literature.[19] Specifically, because of the many encounters among the characters, he sees the form as a kind of proto-novel.

Nevertheless, the authors of the megillot themselves invariably assert a claim to realism—a claim based in part on their association with the Book of Esther, which, of all the biblical books, is the one set closest in historical time to its readers, in a diasporic situation that could easily correspond to or evoke similarities with the communities of the works' medieval audiences. Second, the events recounted in most medieval megillot are supposed to have occurred in a specific place and to involve known individuals. And yet another way for an author to assert the realism of his account was—again with reference to the Book of Esther—to format it as a public letter. Such letters were read aloud in places where people gathered, and, Outhwaite argues, primarily written in Hebrew. As Outhwaite concludes, "many of the Hebrew letters that we now possess were originally intended for public performance, that is to say, they were intended to be read out before the community, and the usual place for this was the synagogue, after one of the regular services."[20] *Megilat Evyatar*, for example, begins by calling its text a "letter" (*mikhtav*), but also instructs the intended recipient, a judge named Parhon ha-Kohen ben Judah of Sijilmasa, to "let the scroll be read" and (later) to treat this "epistle (*iggeret*) and scroll" as a "remembrance and as an advertisement of the miracle." The public recitation of a scroll would thus assume both the ceremonial trappings of a Purim service and the authoritative stance of a public announcement.

Indeed, these selfsame genre conventions free the authors to narrate events in a Hebrew that can be highly ornamented and literary, and sometimes even take the form of rhymed prose (*Megilat Zuta*), while relying on the presumption of historicity. Ultimately, some of these scrolls thus present "realistic" narratives despite being liberally sprinkled with evocative biblical allusions. (It should be pointed out that in general, these texts are plot-driven; the events are narrated with little pause for description. This aspect of the megillah stands in stark contrast to the maqāma, to which we shall now turn, in which the plot is often minimal, but visual description, in particular that of the landscape, is an important element.[21])

Of course, from today's perspective, the events narrated in the scroll of Esther itself take place in a kind of liminal space that to us may well resemble a fantasy world, evoking a historical reality but belonging to none that we would recognize or credit as *actually* real. Like the Book of Esther, then, the medieval megillot present themselves as history but might be politely thought of as, instead, alternate histories.

The maqāma

The Hebrew "classical" maqāma (lit. assembly, maḥberet), based on the Arabic model, is typically brief, written in a rhymed prose interspersed with poems and ornamented in both cases with puns and scriptural allusions. Typically, too, a single story will form part of a series, each in some sense independent of the others in the sense that no continuing plotline unites the series. But they all share the same two protagonists: a narrator and an old acquaintance who plays the role of a rogue. The narrator—telling the story in the first person—usually encounters the rogue perpetrating some sort of con game in a public place, fleecing the crowd by pretending to be a doctor or a destitute beggar. At the end of the

episode, the rogue is revealed to be the narrator's old acquaintance and the two friends are united. In the case of a maqāma, recognized by author and reader alike to be fiction, the actual events of the tale may be presented in an exaggerated, comic fashion, but they often are as mundane as a fake beggar's appeal for charity or the pretensions of a quack physician. That is to say: they are not fantastic.

The form originated in the Arabic world in the tenth century with the initially oral works of al-Hamadhani (969–1008) in Nishapur, Khurasan: improvisations at the end of a courtly learning session. The classical form was developed by al-Hariri (d. 1122), who modeled his maqāmas on those of al-Hamadhani but presented them as authorized—i.e., written—versions. In both the East and in al Andalus, the maqāma was popular enough to take on a life of its own.

As for Hebrew maqāmas, these were produced in great numbers in Christian Spain and Provence from the mid-twelfth to the fifteenth century. The classical form, with two protagonists and the repeating cycle of deception and reconciliation, gave way to a rich variety of forms, some of which were allegorical while others absorbed influences from vernacular literatures.[22] As mentioned earlier, in Hebrew the term maqāma is sometimes used to mean any text written as a narrative using rhymed prose interspersed with rhymed and metered poems.

Given the usual association of the maqāma form with fictionality, it is striking that three extant (or partially extant) Hebrew maqāmas, all from Egypt around the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, seem to present autobiographical accounts of their authors. Each is a first-person narration of a series of events, just like the fictional maqāma, but none features either the classical plot device of a rogue protagonist or any sort of fictional tale at all.

The first of the three, a Cairo Genizah fragment, is not dated, but Simhah Assaf, who published it, was "inclined to think" it comes from the middle of the twelfth century. We have only the beginning section, which is brief enough to be quoted in its entirety.

> I shall articulate the deed of God and His trials, and I will express His praises and His wonders, which He did with me *from my birth to this day* (Gen. 48.15) in my circle, He Who discerns thoughts did good things for me.
>
> First my father came from the land of Sefarad, he descended to dwell in Tzo'an [Egypt] and trembled at the word of God [cf. Isa. 66:5]. He came and dwelt in Ḥanam [Damietta] and God made a miracle for him. Behold, [there was] a voice from the faithful God, and it said to him, "Arise, go to the land of Teman [Yemen]." And Judah arose and prepared his needs and God made his ways prosper. And he rode on a ship, to go to the city which he was told about, and he came there, and the Lord sheltered him in his pavilion [cf. Ps. 27:5], and his path prospered, he cast his burden upon God [cf. Ps. 55:23] and he found silver and gold, and he took for himself from the land of Yemen a praiseworthy wife, imbued with beauty, and she bore him sons and daughters, in the midst of a faithful people. And he returned from this land so that he might return to dwell in Egypt and he bore me and *he called his* [my] *name Solomon* (2 Sam. 12:24) as a sign for him for peace. And I spent ten years in the faithful congregation, and I will sing:
>
> > Give a new song to the Lord, unique one [common epithet for the soul], then said Solomon ben Judah.
> >
> > And for Him is my song, while it is yet your day and night, before the time to depart comes.
> >
> > And I rely on Him and also Him I still trust, and to Him I bring evening and thanksgiving offerings.
> >
> > And when you see His glory and truth, give a new song to God, unique one.

> And it came to pass afterward that the *satan* incited him, while I was still little, to arise and take for himself a second wife, to be in his house *as a fruitful vine* (Ps. 128:3), but she bore to him a son and no more, and she called his name Evyatar, and she bore to him two daughters also, their religion was different.[23] And it came to pass after some days that Shaddai looked down from above and He did with him according to His extensive goodness, and one of his daughters died. [here the text breaks off][24]

This text, which moves between first- and third-person narration, starts with an account of the history, not of the author himself, but of the author's father. In some sense, then, it is not truly autobiographical, although Solomon, the author, does appear as a character in the text and it is very possible that the story's lost continuation would turn to a fully first-person tale. Unfortunately, the text is too brief to be able to characterize it with confidence, but the tone verges on the sardonic, suggesting that it might have been written more with satire in mind than as a straightforward memoir. Despite the tone, the story being told is presented in a quasi-realistic way. First of all, the first-person insertions mean that there is an implicit claim to direct knowledge of the events portrayed, as does the inclusion of the names of the main characters—Judah, Solomon, Evyatar. The text also names specific places; the fact that they are called by Hebrew names (Sefarad, Tzo'an, Ḥanam, Teman) does not much detract from the sense that we are talking about real people and real places. In addition, the specification of a ten-year time span serves to make more concrete the status of the tale as a "real life" story. And finally, the Hebrew used is very lightly ornamented with biblical allusions; importantly, those which do appear do not offer any sort of discordant literary effect. On the contrary, the biblical echoes align with and support the surface meaning of the narrative.

The second, published by Ḥayim Schirmann, also dates from the mid-twelfth century, and also survives as an autograph fragment from the Cairo Genizah: a single page, folded in half and written on all four sides, with numerous crossings-out and additions written into the margins. It happens to have been written by an individual about whom we know quite a lot, due to his idiosyncratic handwriting (and spelling), which allowed the identification of scores of genizah fragments by and referring to him. Abū l-Bayān Moshe b. Levi ha-Levi (d. 1212) was the head (*muqaddam*) of the Jewish community in Qalyūb, a small town about ten miles from Fusṭāṭ. His brother and his father were cantors in Fusṭāṭ,[25] and his own duties in Qalyūb included serving as both cantor and shohet.

The text begins:

> These are the things that occurred to Moses ben Levi in his days, in the days of his youth. And he said:
>
> My brothers, hear my speech. I was, in the days of my youth, happy in my song, and the members of my group rejoiced in my talk, and many were the men who helped me. And I was engaged in my work peacefully and found satisfaction and morning and evening I conversed and dwelled in joy. I was in the market of the perfumers and all of its men were friendly and welcoming to me. And I earned there, with the advice of the faithful and upright merchants, a few dinars.
>
> And I saw the pleasant men of my city [presumably Fusṭāṭ], companions and friends, engaging in the law of the One *Who restores the lonely* (Ps. 68.7), and I desired to join with them in their assemblies and to be among the students. And I said: Let be what will be! And I left all work and I tried to learn some halakhah and I joined with some of the honored ones of the city, and this was my portion, and I went early to the houses of the sages and I attended the pure ones so that they would share with me secrets. . . . [26]

In the following pages, Moses spends some time studying, but then runs out of money. He tries to borrow from a friend but is rebuffed and composes a poem on his situation. He decides he has to move back in with his parents, but after six months at home they turn harsh and he moves out. Leaving home,

Moses comes to an Egyptian village, Qalyūb, a very pleasant place that, letting his friends know where he is, he describes in a poetic panegyric.[27] There, luckily, he encounters a man who is an old friend of his father's and who takes him in—and he, too, earns a poem of praise with which the narrative seems to end.

It is likely that this constitutes the complete text; it is written on all four sides of a bifolio, and the final poem is complete (its last hemistich being identical with its first, as in other poems in the text). I would conjecture that this maqāma might have been composed as a thank-you to the man who offered him hospitality (perhaps in the hope that more hospitality would be forthcoming), or else as an amusing account of his experience for the enjoyment of a family member, perhaps even for his brother, who lived in Fusṭāṭ, where the fragment eventually ended up.

Here too we see some of the same marks of a "realistic" account, various words and phrases that enhance the impression of a real-life experience. Moses situates the events in real places and in real, normal human experiences: "I was in the market of perfumers… I earned… a few dinars"; "after a few days I looked for the money I had in my hand and I didn't find it, for I had eaten and drunk with it and enjoyed the books I had bought"; "I lived with my father and mother six months and they were hard upon me and whenever I suggested that perhaps they might listen to me, they were like enemies to me"; "I came to a village among the cities of Egypt" (in the panegyric poem, the village is specified as Qalyūb). Time markers appear too: the mention of his "six months" stay with his parents, followed by a statement that he left home on a Friday afternoon and soon arrived in his new village. And again, the language is straightforward, here too generally following the biblical model without much by way of ornament; there are few scriptural allusions—those which appear are, again, aligned with their biblical context—nor is there much alliteration or other wordplay. The focus seems to be on conveying the story with a certain level of clarity and the biblical language supports, rather than undermines it.

The third autobiographical maqāma (published in part first by Israel Davidson and then completed by A. M. Haberman), was composed by the Karaite Moses Dar'ī, presumably also around the end of the twelfth century. Praising the cities of Alexandria and Cairo (as Moses ben Levi praises Qalyūb), it is also interwoven with Dar'ī's account of his travels to these cities and his first encounter with the Karaites (suggesting that he joined them as an adult rather than being born into the community).

> I was in the time of my youth, not [yet] poured out from the vessel of companionship into the vessel of wandering, and the days of maidenhood [youth] were oil poured out on my good name, and times of trouble were far from me. [Here follows an extended riff on how happy he was in Alexandria, then a description of that city, and a poem in its honor.] And when I was still there, among my friends and companions, my beloved ones and acquaintances, in my joy and delight, my ear caught a rumor, from a man whom I knew, that in the great city of Cairo [lit. Egypt] [there was] a pure nation and a precious (*segulah*) people, a pure banner raised high above all the communities of the exile, wise and knowing all the words of prophecy and vision, knowing the heavenly knowledge, and its soul alone desired and wanted to keep the Torah and its commandments, and its name was known among the people and it was called "the people of the children of scripture (*'am benei miqra'*) [i.e., the Karaites] . . . And when I heard this thing I arose from my place and I decided in my heart to travel to see what I had heard. I hurried and did not waver, for I said to myself perhaps when I go, I will grasp this great vision… ." [At this point Dar'ī recounts his arrival in Cairo, describes the city, and includes a poem in its praise. He then returns to his narrative, in which he encounters the Karaite community, describes both it and some of its individual members, climaxing with a lengthy panegyric in honor of the Cairo community of Karaites.] Says the narrator ("magid"): And when I had written this poem, as best I could, according to my weak ability, on the subject of the praise of the people of the Lord of hosts that is called Karaites, I then composed from the pleasantness of my tune and the best of my sayings and thoughts the words of this song to the Lord, on the day that the Lord rescued me from

the hand of wandering, from the palm of sorrow and misfortune, and I sang aloud, and I lifted up my tale (*meshali*) and said…[28]

The narrative thus follows Moses Dar'ī's encounter with the Karaite community and how he found his place among them. In structure, it bears a rather striking similarity to the text of Moses ben Levi ha-Levi, though it is much more elaborate. Dar'ī's descriptive passages are more detailed and ornate, and his praise more extensive; where Moses ben Levi ekes out a few lines of description and a brief poem in praise of the village of Qalyūb and one friend of the family, Dar'ī includes panegyrics to two cities, a whole community, and several individuals. Despite the rhetorical extravagance in the panegyric sections, in the narrative sections, Dar'ī too is restrained in his use of allusion, includes place names and descriptions of real individuals.

All three authors, in sum, employ rhymed Hebrew prose that incorporates scriptural allusions in ways that do not obscure the story, name the real places and real people involved, and sometimes include time markers. The texts themselves are relatively straightforward. In fact, there are further similarities among the texts. Two begin with a variation on "I was in the days of my youth…" and, for all of them, except insofar as they indulge in panegyric, the plots—if one can even call them that—do not revolve around rhetorical fireworks.

Sefer sha'ashu'im

Now let us turn to *Sefer Sha'ashu'im*, by Joseph ben Meir ibn Zabara, of whom almost nothing is known. This proto-novel, or frame-tale, or maqāma (there is some scholarly disagreement as to which genre it belongs to) is thought to have been written in the late twelfth century, but even that is not certain.[29] Though composed in Hebrew rhymed prose interspersed with poems, the language is fairly simple—that is, free of any self-conscious display of rhetorical flourishes or parade of vocabulary. But it is not simplistic. Moreover, the relative straightforwardness of the language is more than counterbalanced by the subtlety and complexity of the book's content and narrative structure.

A quick summary: Joseph [ibn Zabara, physician of Barcelona], asleep after his labors, is visited by a man-shaped apparition who wakes him and invites him to eat and drink. Joseph demurs—he must pray before he eats. There follows a debate on the merits and demerits of wine—won, it would appear, by Joseph. Enan ha-Natash ben Arnan ha-Dash, as the newcomer introduces himself, appeals to Joseph's ambitious streak by seeking to entice him to his, Enan's, home village, a place supposedly inhabited by scholars who will appreciate Joseph for his true worth. Employing his scientific knowledge of physiognomy to study Enan's features, Joseph sees that his companion is up to no good, but when he shares this unflattering analysis Enan becomes angry and Joseph is forced to back down. No less futile is Joseph's effort to avoid the trip by relating a cycle of animal-stories whose gist is that one should never leave home. In the end, all efforts unavailing, he and Enan set off together on their donkeys.

On their journey, Enan passes the time by telling stories, and the two also spend a pleasant night at the home of a hospitable old man who similarly regales them with tales and proverbs. Finally, the pair arrive in Enan's village. In a very comic scene, Enan prevents the hungry Joseph from eating by discoursing on the virtues of moderation. Joseph decides to disregard his host's chatter and to eat, but after becoming sated and sleepy he is tormented by Enan with medical questions. These Joseph answers skillfully and then, having weathered the test, turns the tables by subjecting Enan to a series of scientific questions to all of which his hapless companion must answer simply: I do not know.

As morning approaches, Joseph rather belatedly turns his mind to his long-suffering donkey, only to find that it has been deprived of food and muzzled. In the wake of a colloquy between master and beast suffused with parallels to the biblical tale of Balaam, Enan reveals himself as a demon and mocks Joseph for having failed to interpret his name, which, turned backward, exposes his nature: Enan ha-*Satan* ben Arnan ha-*Shed* (demon). Joseph's fright at this revelation proves groundless: Enan immediately becomes

utterly docile. He and Joseph tour the town and its inhabitants, all of whom prove to be as simultaneously foolish and sinful as Enan himself.

Joseph counsels the now-malleable Enan not to marry the girl he has chosen, since she comes from an ignorant family; instead, he provides the demon with a bride of his own choosing. His work apparently completed, Joseph departs for his hometown and the patron he has left behind. The glories of that patron are now sung, followed by some moral injunctions and passages from the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds on the question of which is higher, holiness or humility.

The identity of Enan has been the object of some disagreement among scholars. Does he represent a real person? Is he simply a fictional demon? Or could he be a projection of the narrator's own evil inclination?[30] Enan is referred to as evil and is given attributes—like a ruddy face—topologically associated with the devil. And indeed he does subsequently reveal himself to be a demon, with all of the appropriate pedigrees and warrants as to his lineage and status. But is he the devil without or the devil within? In rabbinic literature, the evil inclination, the *yetzer ha-ra'*, is routinely identified with an outer personification, namely, Satan.[31] Raymond Scheindlin has argued with great persuasiveness that, to the contrary, Enan represents a side of Joseph's own personality—the wicked side.[32] In psychological terms, Enan is "Joseph's alter ego with whom he must work things out in order to return to his former life and station in the 'real' world."[33]

Throughout the work, Ibn Zabara drops hints as to Enan's true nature. When Enan first appears on the scene, he is introduced by means of a common literary device, the prophetic dream-vision.[34]

> And it was night and I, Joseph, was sleeping on my bed, and *my sleep was sweet to me* (Jer. 31:26), for it alone is my portion from all my labor [cf. Ecc. 2:10]. [Here Ibn Zabara develops the theme of sleep and its benefits, eventually returning to the narrative line.] And it came to pass when I was sleeping that I saw in my dream that, behold, *there was before me a tall stature* (I Sam. 16:7) *as the appearance of a man* (Ezek.1:26) was his form, and *he awakened me, as a man who awakens from his sleep* (Zech. 4:1). And he said to me, "Son of man, arise, *what mean you that you sleep*? (Jonah 1:6) Awake and *look upon the wine when it is red* (cf. Prov. 23:29–32). Arise, pray, sit and eat by my side, what I have brought for you from that which my hand has grasped."[35]

From the constellation here of scriptural allusions to prophetic visions, the reader might expect something on the order of an angelic or divine apparition. Enan's opening words are both shocking and amusing: "Awake and *look upon the wine when it is red*." He is invoking a phrase from Proverbs, but only to reverse its sense; for the biblical line actually warns, "Look *not* upon the wine when it is red." The real point of the mangled allusion is to alert the reader to the deceptive nature of Enan—and to the ultimate course of the plot to come. "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red," reads the scriptural verse, "when it gives its color in the cup, when it glides down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a basilisk." Like wine, the ruddy Enan, although presenting himself as a friend who "glides down smoothly," will finally be revealed as a stinging Satan, serpent of old.

A comic leitmotif running through the book is Joseph's inability to recognize Enan's true nature, *despite* the straightforward evidence of his eyes. Early on, analyzing Enan's face, he clearly sees three of his companion's most salient qualities: duplicity, pugnacity, and ignorance.

> And I answered and I said, "Plato the sage said in his book, Physiognomy, whoever has a face *as a face of flames* (Isa. 13:8), he hurries and is hurried and is full of lies. And whoever has eyes that are sunken and hurry to see and to look [i.e., dart about?], he is cunning and crafty and a trickster. And whoever has bushy eyebrows, his speech is heavy, and he has grief and sorrow. And whoever has part of his nose thin and nostrils that are large and wide is angry and quarrelsome

> And whoever has a round forehead is curved, inclining to the corners of his face, is angry in all his words and in all issues. And whoever has large and thick lips is crazy and evil in nature and pugnacious. And whoever has big ears is a fool and foolish. And whoever has a short neck is a deceiver and an enemy to all men.[36]

Presumably reading the face before him, Joseph sees primarily deceitfulness, then shortness of temper, and finally folly. Enan, presenting himself as a friend, finally reveals himself to be an enemy. He promises much and delivers nothing, becomes angry on many occasions over the course of the book, and exposes the extent of his ignorance in their post-prandial scientific exchange. Physiognomy, then, is indeed a reliable indicator of character. And not just physiognomy: one of Enan's most striking attributes is his physical height, a trait one might accept only as adding a vivid touch of drama were it not for the fact that it is mentioned again and again in the course of the book. It is quite consistently a negative trait, often linked with mendacity or wickedness.[37]

This same ability to discern the truth of a man from outer qualities is on display in three stories about a wise judge that Enan tells Joseph en route. In the first, the dowry of a man's daughter is stolen and the judge ferrets out the guilty party: the cantor who lives next door. How does he arrive at this conclusion? By looking at the face of the cantor and perceiving that, despite his reputation as a pious and respectable man, his character is a wicked one. With delicious irony, Enan, at the end of this story, complains that cantors are not to be trusted: they think they know so much, but in fact they are utterly ignorant; they seem to be friendly, but are not, and so on—a perfect list of Enan's own bad qualities.

In the second story, a poor man is given a necklace to sell, but the necklace is taken by a rich man who refuses to give it back, declining even to admit he ever possessed it. And so, once again, "the judge looked upon [the poor man] and behold, grief had bitten him with its teeth until his appearance and the likeness of his face had changed." Just by looking, the judge is able to see that the poor man is telling the truth; having been thus reassured, he then manages to trick the necklace out of the hands of the malefactor.

Finally, in the third story, the judge must decide between a true son and a servant who is pretending to be that son: "And the servant came before him and the judge looked at him in his face and it seemed to him that he was a worthless man." A Solomonic test confirms the judge's suspicions, based once again on a visual examination.

In sum, although Joseph tries, from the outset, to analyze the "secret" interior of Enan, there is no "secret" interior: he is exactly what he appears to be, transparent to anyone who has the wit to understand what the eyes see. For a long time, Joseph lacks that wit—he may see a devil in his donkey, but he cannot see the devil within himself. But then the little light dawns, the shadows flee away, and he becomes worthy at last to be made whole, and therefore to return home.

The structure of this book is two-fold, with each "fold" serving the narrative's larger purposes. Ibn Zabara's artfulness is evident throughout. On the one hand, the structure follows that of a frame-story, its consistent narrative flow interrupted by stories, parables, proverbs, and scientific maxims. On the other hand, the story involves two protagonists, as does the typical maqāma; the previously unknown identity of one of them is revealed at the end. In other words, the frame-story, in itself, follows the pattern of the classical maqāma: a man is enticed with the promise of hospitality and erudite fellowship, but once at the establishment of his host finds himself in the company of a stingy ignoramus who cannot answer any of his questions and almost starves him. The host then reveals himself, only this time not as the old trickster companion but as a very demon (unless, of course, that demon is the evil inclination of Jewish tradition, and the close companion of every man).

For the most part, the various "interruptions" of the frame-story occur in the course of disputations between Joseph and Enan, To be sure, the interpolations are entertaining in themselves, embedded in the stream of the narrative like so many apparently disparate stones in a river, over and around which the river flows. But in fact the relationship between the two elements is far from simple; the interruptions are neither frivolous nor arbitrary but strategic and polemically useful.

In the case of the proverbs and scientific dicta, the relation is obvious; the maxims are cited in order to support a particular opinion uttered within the context of the frame-story. In that sense, they might be seen as offering a scientific commentary on the narrative. This is clearest in the early pages, where a few lines of narrative will be followed by a few lines of medical information. As the two protagonists become more fully developed, scientific knowledge is more adroitly woven into the story, very often in the form of proofs adduced for differing opinions. At the same time, the interpolated stories themselves, which could even be excised without greatly affecting the ongoing plot, give depth and vividness to the arguments of the characters while also commenting ironically on the relations between the two characters that form the essential thread of the plot.[38] This kind of relation between frame-story and embedded tales is hardly unique to *Sefer sha'ashu'im* among medieval narratives. We find a similar, if more primitive, structure in the very early *Tales of Sendebar*. But it makes reading the work very deeply satisfying, and it invites further reflection on the text's multiple levels of framing, with which we may conclude our discussion.

Sefer sha'ashu'im is prefaced by a lengthy verse dedication to Sheshet ben Benveniste.[39] Along with the text's initial paragraphs, it establishes that the author and the narrator are one and the same by highlighting both the work's literary style and its "intellectual" contents (i.e., the medical and scientific elements and arguments):

1. See the book, with a pen of eloquence I have written it,

    And from the top of the mountains of intellect I have hewed it.

2. And from the words of the sons of understanding I have carved it

    And from the sayings of the men of wisdom I have gathered it. …

Turning to address Sheshet ben Benveniste, the poet then expresses his devotion to his "prince":

7. To Rav Sheshet, prince (*nesi'*) of my people, I have sent it

    I have loved him as the beloved of my soul

8. Out of all men who rule I have chosen him

    I have taken him to be my prince (*sar*) and lord. …

At this point Ibn Zabara turns to his own situation and, without naming Enan, spends over ten lines abusing him:

22. I regret the time I listened to a fool,

    He brought me to see him until I called him.

23. I am astonished how I bore him upon my shoulder,

    Weighing him as [Mt.] Tabor and Mt. Nophel.

24. And if his name were mine, I would reject it,

    And if he had a body, I would burn it. …

28. And were it not that I guard the honor of my soul (*nefesh*)

And from the beginning, the preciousness of my intellect (*sikhli*),

29. With the breath (*ruaḥ*) of my mouth, without a sword, I would kill him

Indeed, I would slaughter him as [one would] a bull or sheep. …

As Scheindlin has argued, these lines themselves suggest strongly that Enan is no human figure but rather the projection of Joseph's evil inclination. But more important for our purposes here is the insertion into the prefatory poem of a protagonist from the story. Such initial verses, common in medieval Hebrew works, and were usually employed as a way for the author (or translator), speaking in his own voice, to address his reader.[40] In this somewhat vague and allusive poem, however, Ibn Zabara brings "real life" and fiction into awkward and striking contact; his poem, in the voice of a real person (the author) addressing another presumably real person (the patron), alludes to having returned from the events depicted in the (entirely fictional) tale to come.

After the prefatory poem comes the opening scene (which evokes the opening of the book of Job):

> There was a man in the land of Barcelona, Joseph ben Zabara was his name. He was peaceful and quiet from his youth, with his friends and companions. Those who knew him became close to him, and those whom he knew loved him. He was among them honored and esteemed; they all loved him. And also he honored and respected them, served them and healed them. He prepared healing for any one of them who was ill, with the help of his Creator, according to his skill and knowledge. And he involved himself with their sickness to serve them and minister to them, with love and care, the adult according to his maturity and the young according to his youth. And every man loved Joseph, and sought his company, but *Joseph was sold for a servant* (Ps. 117:5).[41]

Here too, in this passage, which sets the scene, the biblical allusions are minimal, the location is a real one and the narrator is a real person: the author, Joseph ibn Zabara.

As noted earlier, Jewish authors of maqāmas seem to have assumed that an integral requirement of the genre itself was a disclaimer making clear that the narrative should be understood as fiction. A framing device involving a patron was thus one way in which such authors could make the fictionality of their text explicit. Yet Ibn Zabara, as David Wacks has pointed out, "far from distancing himself from the narrator by declaring him fictional, . . . goes the other way and closes the narrative gap between author and narrator by making himself the narrator."[42] Although the dream vision with which the action of the tale opens does establish the fictionality of the events that follow, to a certain point, Wacks argues, Ibn Zabara has already undermined the "dream" excuse by commenting in the prefatory poem that he has recently returned from the events depicted in the text to come. Thus has the frame of the story been deliberately broken to assert that the story did in fact take place.

This claim of historicity comes with a reward: it allows Ibn Zabara the literary freedom to deploy the more fantastic elements of the story (a talking donkey, the demon-companion, a visit to the land of the demons) with far greater effectiveness than they might otherwise possess. Idit Einat-Nov, in the course of her Freudian reading of the story, also notes that Ibn Zabara's framing creates "the impression of a realistic story, one that obeys the known laws of the real world, *and so* puts the strange occurrence that forms the basis of the rest of the story in even starker relief" (emphasis added).[43] In other words, it is precisely the early setting of a "realistic" scene, or at least one that purports to represent the "real world," that allows the figure of Enan and all the fantastic aspects of his character to be embodied to such great effect.

In his study of Iberian maqāmas, Wacks subsumes the genre under the heading of frame-tale; because they incorporate stories within an overarching structure, they are in some fundamental sense about the *telling* of tales and about performance. Like the "club story" that Farah Mendelson points to as a key element feeding into development of the portal-quest fantasy, the maqāma and the frame-tale both present their narratives as past, closed events.[44] In the case of the maqāma, moreover, as we saw in the autobiographical examples, the story is told in the first person as though experienced directly. This device of a first-person narrative, Wacks suggests, signals that the tale being told falls into the literary category of "anecdote"—engaging the reader by asserting that the events being recounted did, in fact, happen to the person speaking—as opposed to the fable, told in the third person, where the events have no claim to reality.[45] The autobiographical maqāma, like the anecdote, uses the first-person voice to convey personal knowledge of the events described, while the medieval megillah uses the third-person voice, but narrates real events.

But to return to the artistry of Ibn Zabara. Disentangling the layers: Ibn Zabara the "actual" author is making present-Joseph (the narrator) tell a story in which a character, Enan, has a secret identity; Enan (or present-Joseph, who narrates past events) drops hints in the stories about Enan's true nature, while only past-Joseph (and the first-time reader or listener) doesn't know how the story will end. This characteristic is true of any story couched as the narrator's own personal experience. The events in the story are laid out for the reader (or listener) in a way that does not make full sense until the end of the entire narrative; nor did it make sense to the narrator as he was experiencing the events himself.

Thus, the revelation of Enan's true nature as a demon at the end of *Sefer sha'ashu'im* comes as a complete surprise to Joseph, the hapless narrator. And yet the way Ibn Zabara tells the tale points over and over to the coming revelation, laid out in hints and allusions strewn throughout like so many breadcrumbs for the alert reader. On a deep level, the work together with the embedded stories is deeply infused with what we might today call foreshadowing; the true nature of Enan is completely unknown to the protagonist, while the *author/narrator* signals it over and over again to the reader. This is one of the things that makes rereading the work so endlessly rewarding.

Normally, the magical qualities of a maqama inhere less in fantastic or impossible events than in the rhetorical skill of the author: his eloquence and learning, his scriptural allusions and word play. Here, despite the maqāma format, Ibn Zabara's Hebrew is, significantly, relatively straightforward and focused on narrative. And Ibn Zabara works hard to counteract the assumption of fictionality by certain authorial choices: the first-person, past-tense narrative; the localization of the initial action in a known city, Barcelona; and the careful identification of himself—as real-life author—with the narrator of the tale. All of these choices characterize the three autobiographical maqamas considered above as well, but here Ibn Zabara adds two more: the elaborate framing of the beginning of the narrative, and, in particular, the adroit use of his dedicatory poem to bridge the distance between the real-world author and the characters and events of the story.[46]

As is the case for all narrative, the reader's expectations from and interpretations of a text are conditioned by his own culture; a reader or listener recognizes the sign systems of his own society, and thus where the presumption of reality ends and the presumption of fantasy begins. The temptation is sometimes to assume a "primitive" reader on the other end of a medieval story. But the medieval Jews who wrote, read, and copied these texts were neither naïve nor primitive readers. On the contrary, they were both learned and intellectually sophisticated. Ibn Zabara's tale is an impressive example of how sophisticated authors and readers alike could be.

Conclusion

For the genre of fantasy literature in the modern era, John Clute offers this working definition:

> A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when it is set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms.[47]

More recently, for medieval Jewish narratives, David Rotman has defined the "marvelous" in similar terms:

> First, they must be alien and exceptional in relation to the narrating community's life experience and everyday reality. At the same time, the members of the narrating community must believe them to be possible in the real, extra-literary world. Third, they must be tangible: they must be described as perceivable by the senses (especially the sense of sight), often saturating or overpowering them.[48]

As I have argued here, the use of literary Hebrew in medieval belles lettres—in particular the near-constant incorporation of scriptural allusion and quotation—already places the reader in an imaginary world, or, in Clute's terms, an otherworld. In the classical maqāma, wordplay, unusual vocabulary, and scriptural allusiveness tend to take center stage; the "action" of the story is in the writing, in the author's skill with language, and plots can be reduced to mere opportunities for the author to deploy a new set of Hebrew terms. This kind of compositional technique can serve to wrench the reader out of the narrative, by reminding him again and again of the author's act of writing and, in turn, of his own act of reading; in the case of the maqama this is, of course, intentional.

Ibn Zabara, however, is not engaged in writing a classical maqāma. His literary skill is certainly on display, but it is devoted to weaving together—out of many disparate stories and anecdotes and maxims—a coherent, and internally believable, tale, if one with magical elements. Despite the difficulties, and Ibn Zabara's other literary ambitions, he attempts to induce in the reader a sense that the events taking place in his otherworld are indeed, to use Clute's term, possible.[49] Moreover, as demonstrated above, in both the genre of the megillah and that of the "autobiographical" maqāma, certain authorial choices can similarly move a text closer to the realm of the mimetic. These choices include the use of names of real places and real people and other details that fix the location of the tale in a "real" context, as well as the restrained use of biblical intertext for the narrative—allusion rather than direct quotation, taken from a context that supports rather than undermines the narrative line. Given that the interplay between impossible events and a mimetic narrative is a characteristic of fantasy literature, one might say that *Sefer sha'ashu'im* should be categorized as such. It is a stretch, but, given the constraints of the form, perhaps not too great a stretch.

But a different order of question remains: is *Sefer sha'ashu'im* to be considered *Jewish* fantasy literature? To some extent, that is surely the case. The use of literary medieval Hebrew to construct an otherworld has already defined that otherworld as Jewish. Everyone in it speaks Hebrew, and the many jokes and puns rely on a knowledge of Hebrew scripture and sometimes, too, of the Talmud. The revelation that Enan is a demon is further Judaized by identifying him as the *yetzer ha-ra'*. As for the inclusion of scientific maxims and animal fables, that might just suggest the degree to which the intellectual world of the Jewish author and Jewish readers of this text was more cosmopolitan than not.

To be sure, the form of the classical maqama, which shapes the overall plot of the work, stems from Arabic and not Jewish literature. And the frame-tale structure, too, ultimately comes from non-Jewish sources. Is the Jewishness of this work, then, only skin-deep? In analyzing *The Tale of the Jerusalemite*, an eighth- or ninth-century story of a man who travels to the land of the demons (as Joseph does at the end of *Sefer sha'ashu'im*), David Stern writes that it "enlists imaginative narrative as a medium for exploring the possibility of existence beyond the borders of Jewish historical reality, an existence that must have been nearly inconceivable for a medieval Jew." Assessing the "real importance" of such medieval narratives, he continues: "they show us a possibility of Jewish imagining that grows

directly out of classical Jewish tradition and its textual life, an imagining that builds upon Judaism's very diction, its imagery, its fears and dreams and longings."[50]

Sefer sha'ashu'im draws on a different literary genre from that of *The Tale of the Jerusalemite*, but in its relevance to understanding how imaginative tales express the yearnings of medieval Jews it is not so very different at all. The underlying quintessence of the medieval Jewish "story" is the relationship between God and the Jewish people, and it, too, has a narrative, with a developing plot. First there is the honeymoon, but then comes trouble in the home, expulsion, and exile. The story ends with reconciliation and redemption. The allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, for example, is fundamentally based on reading this Jewish story into the biblical text. From there, the tale found lasting resonance in religious poetry and some kabbalistic theory.[51]

The elements of this story lend themselves extremely well to fantasy. More importantly for our deliberations, it might be roughly mapped onto the classical maqāma insofar as the latter (almost) always concludes with a moment of recognition and reconciliation. And the non-classical maqāma, as it developed in Hebrew, bears even greater structural resemblance to the Jewish story. This is true for Solomon Ibn Saqbel's *Neum Asher ben Yehudah*,[52] Judah Ibn Shabbetai's *Minhat Yehudah*,[53] and others,[54] as well as for two of the autobiographical maqāmas treated above. An idyllic period (often, specifically, in the author's "youth") is followed by a disturbance, major or minor, which leads to exile and wandering, and is eventually resolved—in the case of these autobiographical maqamas, by finding a new home.

In *Sefer sha'ashu'im*, the plot follows the same arc. Joseph leaves his peaceful existence in Barcelona, endures lengthy travels with Enan, and eventually, reconciled to his true self, returns home. Just as the medieval megillot, which claim to present real, historical events in a biblically inflected Hebrew, take as their model the book of Esther and likewise offer a plot that ends in Jewish triumph, so, too, do the Hebrew maqamas end with the story resolved. But crucially, and again like the megillot, maqamas hold the reader's interest with the events that take place *before* the resolution, which most frequently takes the form less of salvation than of reconciliation. In this way, they can be categorized as medieval *diasporic* stories; literarily speaking, the final redemption is, perhaps, the least interesting thing about them.

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[1] This of course is not true of all medieval prose texts, such as, for example, technical works of science, philosophy, or medicine, for while medieval Hebrew may not have placed all the words they needed for their subject at their disposal, authors of texts like these refrained almost entirely—except, for example in their introductions—from inserting biblical allusions into their works, and they mostly felt free to use any available word, taken from whatever sources (transliterated loan words, calques, etc.) they had. It seems likely that the authors recognized that incorporating biblical allusions into their text would tend to remove it from the realm of reality.

[2] Dan Pagis, "Variety in Medieval Rhymed Narratives," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 27 (1978): 79-98.

[3] Matti Huss, "'It Never Happened, Nor Did It Ever Exist': The Status of Fiction in the Hebrew Maqama," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 18 (2001): 57–104 (Hebrew).

[4] Rina Drory, "The Maqama," in *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), eds. M. Menocal, R. Scheindlin, & M. Sells, 190–210.

[5] Ben Outhwaite, "Lines of Communication: Medieval Hebrew Letters of the Eleventh Century," in *Scribes as Agents of Language Change*, ed. Esther-Miriam Wagner, Ben Outhwaite, and Bettina Beinhoff (Berlin, 2013), 183–198, 190–191; see also Mark R. Cohen, "On the Interplay of Arabic and Hebrew in the Cairo Geniza Letters," in *Studies in Arabic and Hebrew Letters in Honor of Raymond P. Scheindlin*, eds. Jonathan P. Decter and Michael Rand (Piscataway, NJ, 2007), 17–35; Arnold E. Franklin, "Reading Geniza Letters Anew," *Jewish History* 32 (2019): 551–558; Arnold E. Franklin, "More Than Words on a Page: Letters as Substitutes for an Absent Writer," in

Franklin, Margariti, Rustow, and Simonsohn, eds., *Jews, Christians and Muslims*, 287–305; Ben Outhwaite, "Karaite Epistolary Hebrew: The Letters of Toviyyah ben Moshe," in Exegesis and Grammar in Medieval Karaite Texts, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Oxford, 2001), 195–234.

[6] Drory, "The Maqama."

[7] John Clute, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), "Taproot Texts."

[8] Another, related genre is that of the chronicle. These often consist merely of chronological place markers indicating historical events in a chain, sometimes a chain of transmission for, say, the oral law. Beginning in 1887, Neubauer published a group of medieval (and early modern) chronicles. Megilat ta'anit (an Aramaic narrative plus a later Hebrew commentary: a list of days when one must not fast). Seder 'olam rabbah: a chronology from Adam to Bar Kokhba. Seder 'olam zuta: an eighth-century chronology from Adam to Jehoiachim; Seder 'olam, an eleventh-century history of the rabbis, by Yerahmiel. Seder 'olam zuta ve-seder tannaim ve-amoraim, completed 1044, also by Yerahmiel. Iggeret Sherira Ga'on: an account of the oral law and its transmission. A chronicle in Arabic from creation to 1159. A chronicle from creation to 1467 by Joseph ibn Tsaddik of Arevalo (originally a chapter in a ritual work, Zekher Tzaddik). Divre Joseph, by Joseph ben Isaac Sanbari of Alexandria (extracts). Sefer Yuhasin aka Megilat Ahimaaz. The diary of David Reuveni.

[9] Judith Dishon, *The Physician and the Demon, A Critical Edition of the Book of Delight by Joseph Ibn Zabara* (Jerusalem: Haberman Institute for Literary Research, 2017) (Hebrew); Moses Hadas (trans.), *The Book of Delight by Joseph Ben Meir Zabara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

[10] For an account of the various opinions regarding the date, see Aryeh Kasher, "The Historical Background of 'Megillath Antiochus,'" *PAAJR* 48 (1981): 207–230.

[11] See S. Atlas and M. Perlmann, "Saadia on the Scroll of the Hasmoneans," *PAAJR* 14 (1944): 1–23, 21).

[12] Moses Gaster, "The Scroll of the Hasmoneans," *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists* 2 (1893): 3–32, 28.

[13] Sacha Stern, *The Jewish Calendar Controversy of 921/2 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[14] Zvi Malachi, *Sugyot be-sifrut ha-'aravit shel yemei ha-beinayim* (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1971), 33–39.

[15] Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahimaaz ben Paltiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

[16] See, for example, Mark R. Cohen, *Jewish Self-Government in Medieval Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Arnold E. Franklin, *This Noble House*: *Jewish Descendants of King David in the Medieval Islamic East* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 2012); Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[17] Translated by Norman Golb. See Norman Golb, "Megilat 'Ovadyah ha-ger," in *Mehkerei 'edot u-genizah*, ed. Shelomo Morag and Issachar Ben-Ami (Jerusalem, 1981).

[18] A. Neubauer, "Egyptian Fragments: Megilot, Scrolls Analogous to That of Purim, with An Appendix on the First Negidim," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 8 (1896): 551-561.

[19] Zvi Malachi, *Sugyot be-sifrut ha-'aravit shel yemei ha-beinayim* (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 1971).

[20] Ben Outhwaite, "Lines of Communication," 191. See also Rina Drory, "Words beautifully put": Hebrew versus Arabic in tenth-century Jewish literature. In Joshua Blau & Stefan C. Reif, Genizah Research after ninety years. The case of Judaeo-Arabic, 53–63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[21] See Jonathan P. Decter, "A Myrtle in the Forest: Landscape and Nostalgia in Andalusian Hebrew Poetry," *Prooftexts* 24 (2004): 135-66; "Landscape and Culture in the Medieval Hebrew Rhymed Prose Narrative," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007): 257-285; *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 2007); also Judith Dishon, "Medieval Panorama in the Book of Tahkemoni," *PAAJR* 56 (1990): 11–27.

[22] Arie Schippers describes six types (picaresque, novellas and stories, stories with debate, just the debate, fables and folklore, science), which he admits is artificial as there are many overlaps among them. The types he does not

describe: laudatory, descriptive, didactic, moralistic, polemical, and "minor." Arie Schippers, "The Hebrew maqama," In J. Hämeen-Anttila (Ed.), *Maqama: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 302-327.

[23] Assaf notes a suggestion that this means they converted to another religion.

[24] Simhah Assaf, "Sources for Jewish History in Spain," *Zion* 6 (1941): 33–45, 44–45.

[25] Alan Elbaum, Fragment of the Month; Amir Ashur, Fragment of the Month.

[26] Hayim Schirmann, *Shirim Hadashim min ha genizah*, 379.

[27] S. D. Goitein published a translation of selected parts of this poem:

"I am full of joy, folks, with the help of Him who dwells in Heaven:

This is a medicine which heals all maladies and takes away all sorrows.

The wells hold water sweeter than juices, the airs are cool.

Orchards gird the town bringing fruits, glorious and refreshing,

Dates, apples, and pomegranates, vineyards and almond trees, as well as …

Fresh fruit around the year, summer and winter.

Pure animals roam in the groves, and birds nest in the trees.

You do not see dust on the ground. All around there are only gardens and water.

The wine they press is seasoned with aromatic spices of all sorts.

[And this:]

The buckets on their waterwheels sing with a lovely voice like that of doves." (Goitein, Med. Soc. V, 95).

[28] Davidson published a single remaining verse from the following poem, the rest being missing from the manuscript that he had, but Haberman found it in another manuscript and published the rest of the work—i.e., the final 12 lines of the poem praising God; a few lines by the narrator expressing gratitude for finding his place with the Karaite community; the statement that the mahberet has been completed; a header in Arabic likely by the scribe ("After this he said this petition for mercy, by the author, may his memory be blessed"); a four-line poem; another Arabic header; and another few verses. Israel Davidson, "The Maqama of Alexandria and Cairo," *Mada'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1926): 296 – 308 (Hebrew); A. M. Haberman, "Supplement to the Maqama of Alexandria and Cairo of Moses Dar'i," *PAAJR* 33 (1965): 35–40 (Hebrew).

[29] Davidson went to great lengths to produce a date for ibn Zabara (~1160), but the result is not altogether convincing. See I. Davidson's Appendix 1 in his edition of the *Sefer Sha'ashu'im*.

[30] See Idit Einat-Nov, "Uncertainty as a Poetic Principle: A Reading of the Opening Scene in Joseph Ben Zabara's The Book of Delight," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 15 (2021) 153–168, 154, note 2.

[31] Incidentally, Maimonides, in the *Guide* III.22, quotes b.Bava Batra 16a to argue that the terms "satan" and the "angel of death" and the evil inclination are one and the same and Maimonides cites three specific places in scripture where the Bible refers to a "vision of prophecy" in which a demonic figure appears. All of these, according to Maimonides, simply teach a concept embodied in the saying: "For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Gen. 8:21) A rationalist (Maimonidean) reading of *Sefer sha'ashu'im* would therefore lead one to conclude that the adversary-demon Joseph sees in his dream, is merely a figure symbolizing the evil inclination within him. See: II Sam. 24:17 (And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite); Zech. 3:1 (And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and the adversary (*satan*) standing at his right hand to resist him.); Num. 22:32 (And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me.). All of these incidents appear in the story in relation to Enan. When Enan first appears to Joseph, the words: "he waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep" come from Zechariah 4:1, right after the scene with the satan. The reference to the episode with David is contained in Enan's patronymic itself. In the 1 Chronicles scene that parallels that in 2 Sam. cited by Maimonides,

(1 Chron. 21.15: And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the Lord beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshingfloor of Arnan the Jebusite.) Arnan is the man (*ha-dash*, "who was threshing" (21:20) whose threshing floor is close to the "*satan*." And, of course, parallels with Balaam are repeatedly pressed in the scene between Joseph and his donkey.

[32] Raymond P. Scheindlin, "*Sefer Sha'ashuim*—Maqama or medieval Bildungsroman?" *Ha-Doar* 37 (1986): 26-29 (Hebrew).

[33] Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Amiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 139.

[34] See Dan Pagis, "The Poet as Prophet in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, J. Kugel, ed. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[35] Dishon, *The Physician and The Demon*, 84–85.

[36] Dishon, *The Physician and The Demon*, 100–102. See Ithamar Gruenwald, "Further Jewish Physiognomic and Chiromantic Fragments," *Tarbiz* 40 (1971): 301-319 (Hebrew).

[37] It appears, for example in the story (told by Enan himself) of the eunuch and the countryman, where the upshot is that a tall man has been hiding in the king's harem and sleeping with all his wives. The revelation of the man's presence is the climax of the story: "And [the countryman's daughter] said: My lord the king, seek among your wives and handmaidens and concubines and you shall find among them a handsome youth, *beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance* (Gen. 39:6) *from his shoulders and upwards taller than any of the people*" (I Sam. 9:2). By connecting the intruder with Enan, David Segal points to the irony implicit in this particular tale: "that the odd-looking demon, Enan, ... should tell a tale wherein (1) a person of unusual physical appearance (the tall youth in the harem) is revealed as an evildoer, and (2) he, Enan (represented by the eunuch), is ultimately responsible for an evildoer's unmasking." Segal, "On Certain Delights of The Book of Delight," 198.

[38] This has been skillfully demonstrated by David S. Segal, "On Certain Delights of The Book of Delight by Joseph ben Meir Ibn Zabara: An Examination of 'The Tale of the Eunuch and the Wise Daughter of a Countryman," *Hebrew Annual Review* 1 (1977): 181–203.

[39] Dishon, *The Physician and The Demon*, 73–78.

[40] As Gérard Genette might have pointed out, they served as doorways or frames, or even portals, through which the reader might step, metaphorically speaking, to encounter the text.

[41] Dishon, *The Physician and The Demon*, 83–84.

[42] David Wacks, *Framing Iberia: Maqāmāt and Frametale Narratives in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 79.

[43] Idit Einat-Nov, "Uncertainty as a Poetic Principle: A Reading of the Opening Scene in Joseph Ben Zabara's The Book of Delight," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 15 (2021) 153–168.

[44] Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University, 2013).

[45] Wacks, *Framing Iberia*, 49.

[46] "This dedicatory poem occurs, naturally, at the head of the book. Its matter however, is irrelevant to the body of the book, except in so far as it throws light upon the life of the author. Its merit being no better (and, it should be added, no worse) than most productions of its kind, it has been thought best to consult the interest of the reader and relegate it to its present position." Hadas, *Book of Delight*, 181.

[47] John Clute, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997), "Fantasy."

[48] He continues: "This third feature reinforces the first two, as the marvelous phenomenon's tangibility serves to stress both its exceptionality and its real possibility. To count as marvelous, a phenomenon must meet all three conditions: it is not marvelous if it is familiar or mundane, or if the narrating community considers it impossible in the real world." David Rotman, "At the Limits of Reality: The Marvelous in Medieval Ashkenazi Hebrew Folktales," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20 (2013): 101–128, 104.

[49] See Idit Einat-Nov, “Believe it or Not: A Literary Examination of the Banquet Scene in Joseph Ibn Zabara’s The Book of Delight,” Hebrew Studies 60 (2019): 375–387.

[50] David Stern, “Just Stories: Medieval Hebrew Narrative,” *Tikkun* 5 (1990) 41–43, 110–112, 112.

[51] See, for example, Arthur Green, “Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic

Symbol in Its Historical Context,” *AJS Review* 26 (2002): 1–52; Maud Kozodoy, “Messianic Interpretation of the Song of Songs in LateMedieval Iberia,” in *The Hebrew Bible in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Exegesis, Literature, Philosophy, and the Arts*, J. Decter and A. Prats, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 117–147.

[52] See Raymond P. Scheindlin, “Fawns of the Palace and Fawns of the Field,” *Prooftexts* 6 (1986): 189–203.

[53] See Talya Fishman, “A Medieval Parody of Misogyny: Judah ibn Shabbetai’s ‘Minhat Yehudah Sone ha-Nashim,’” *Prooftexts* 8 (1988): 89–111.

[54] For example, see the third-person narrative “‘Ezrat nashim,” written in response to Judah ibn Shabbetai by one “Isaac.” Schirmann, 88–96.