

THE GOLDEN AGE OF JEWISH CULTURE

Abstract

In the Middle Ages, when the political center of Muslim Spain was first Seville and later Córdoba, a way of life and institutions characteristic of an Islamic state were established in Spain. The lifestyle of Muslim Spain, suitable for a highly developed country, and the successful adaptation of Jews to it led to the flourishing of Jewish culture and literature in Arabized Spain, which spans the 8th to the 12th centuries. Jewish literature of the period called the Golden Age; was greatly influenced by Arabic and was distinguished by its thematic and genre diversity. Romantic lyricism is widely represented in Andalusian poetry.

The favorite themes of Andalusian poets also include motifs of friendship, wine, and revelry, to which both Arab and Jewish poets dedicated their poems.

At the end of the 11th century, the genre and stylistic features of Jewish secular poetry were finally established in Andalusia. During the heyday of Jewish poetry, along with traditional Eastern Arabic genres, new, innovative genres and themes adapted to the existing reality emerged, vividly conveying the moods, feelings, and emotions of Jewish poets. Themes such as homeland and the issue of belonging to it, "Elegy for the Cities," or longing ("Hanin") became prevalent. Longing for the homeland was considered the most common theme in Andalusian poetry. One of the significant innovations was that Jewish poets began to write secular poems alongside traditional liturgical poetry.

The article presents the poets of the Andalusian Golden Age of Jewish culture (Yehuda Halevi, Shelomo ibn Gebirol, Moshe ibn Ezra, Abraham ibn Ezra, Shmuel Hanagid, Yehuda Alkharizi, and others), notes their merits and creative features and discusses the innovative genres and themes characteristic of this period.

Keywords: *Andalusian, Biblical, Hebrew language, Arabic poetry, innovative themes*

In the Middle Ages, when the political center of Muslim Spain was first Seville, and later Cordoba, the way of life and institutions characteristic of the Islamic state were created in Spain. The lifestyle of Muslim Spain, suitable for a highly developed country, and the successful adaptation of Jews to it, led to the flourishing of Jewish culture and literature in Arabized Spain, which lasted from the 8th to the 12th centuries.

The general cultural atmosphere in the country also affected the Jews, who gained influence and wealth, began to support the arts and sciences, and attracted philosophers, poets, and translators, thereby contributing to the development of Jewish culture. Thanks to a unique cultural situation, the 10th to 12th centuries were marked by an unprecedented flourishing of literary creativity. This period of Hebrew literature is called the "Golden Age." Its main characteristics are peaceful relations between Jews and Arabs,

and Jews having certain civil rights and status. Of the other branches of culture, fiction, especially poetry, developed most successfully. Jewish poets in Spain demonstrated the poetic flow of the Old Testament books in their artistic creations, revived a dead spoken language in poetry, and wrote poems only in Hebrew. However, they also created important works in Arabic.

It is also worth considering that, due to the influence of Arabic culture and the active mastery of the Arabic language by Jewish poets, the language of medieval Hebrew literature is characterized by diglossia - a linguistic situation when the creative activity of the same society is in two languages: Arabic and Hebrew. The Hebrew literature of this period was greatly influenced by Arabic and was distinguished by its thematic and genre diversity.

Favorite themes of Andalusian poets include motifs of friendship, wine, and revelry, which are prominent in the works of both Arab and Jewish poets. Creations within the "adab" genre (didactic) are also widespread. In the 10th century, the Arabic verse form known as "zajal" emerged, characterized by a strophic composition organized by rhymes, and it gained popularity in the following centuries. During the Middle Ages, one of the main genres of Arabic poetry became "madhi" (praise or glory, also known as panegyric), which easily became a political tool and acquired an instructive character. The poets who produced works in this genre often emerged as religious and political leaders, defending the interests of their groups at the court of the Caliph. Most of the praise poems, authored by court poets, were dedicated to the rulers of the country or the nobles of the royal court. Odes dedicated to noble patrons were also composed in Hebrew, often greatly exaggerating their real and stereotypical achievements. In this form of extensive odes, which Jews referred to as "qasida" in Arabic, poets described in detail the nobility and education of their patrons. The verse form "qasida" (meaning something with a purpose) held special significance in the development of medieval poetry. With its large volume and sophisticated form, "qasida" allowed poets to express individualism and aspirations while creating works well-suited to their time and circumstances.

During the heyday of Jewish poetry, along with traditional Eastern Arab genres, new innovative genres and themes adapted to the existing reality emerged, which quite vividly conveyed Jewish poets' moods, feelings, and emotions. By the end of the 11th century, the genre and stylistic features of Jewish secular poetry in Andalusia were finally formed. The article discusses innovative genres and themes. Longing for the homeland was considered the most common theme in Andalusian poetry. Topics such as the homeland and the issue of belonging to it, "Elegy for the City" or longing ("Hanin") become relevant. This type of poetry emphasizes the connection between Andalusian poets and the places they lived, as well as the nature that inspired their work. This also raises the issue of belonging to one's homeland, which differs between Muslim and Jewish poets. The attitude of Andalusian poets toward their homeland is elevated. Muslims (with a few exceptions) perceive the Andalusian region as their homeland. Their love is intertwined with the fascinating nature and landscape of Andalusia. The sense of belonging of Muslims to these places is so profound that they consider Andalusia a special place, a paradise on earth. In contrast, the perception of Jewish poets regarding Andalusia is different. Although most of the poets were born and raised in Andalusian cities, they do not hide their longing for the land of Zion in their work. For them, Andalusia is merely a foreign place, a land of exile, and until they

reach their homeland, they suffer, feel homesick, and find no peace until they return to Zion, which is reflected in their poetry. Wandering and exile are important and central themes in the emotions expressed by Andalusian poets. Their poems convey a longing for places they have avoided, left, or been separated from for various reasons. In Andalusian poetry, “hanin” (חנין), meaning “longing,” refers to both place and homeland. The creation of “maqams” in Hebrew according to the Arabic model can be considered the last glimmer of Hebrew poetry. When reviewing the genres of the Andalusian period, special attention is paid to the so-called “piyyut”, which is common in the poetry of this time. Also, one of the most important innovations of Jewish poets was that, along with traditional liturgical poetry, they began to compose secular poems.

The article presents the poets of the Andalusian Golden Age of Jewish culture (Yehuda Halevy, Shelomo ibn Gebirol, Abraham ibn Ezra, Yehuda Alkharizi, Shmuel Hanagid, and others) and notes their merits and creative features.

The “Golden Age” of Hebrew literature in Spain began in the mid-10th century with the emergence of secular Hebrew poetry in Córdoba. Menahem ibn Saruk (10th century) was the first poet to create secular verses, and his works, written in Hebrew, are among the earliest examples of medieval secular poetry. In this period, Ibn Saruk’s contemporary, Dunash ben Labrat, revolutionized Hebrew poetry by developing motifs, genres, and meters borrowed from Arabic poetry.

The development of Jewish secular poetry is closely associated with the contributions of the prominent Spanish poet, statesman, and military leader Shmuel Hanagid (993-1056). The panegyric and epigram genres were fully formed in his works. He wrote commentaries on the Talmud, discussed Hebrew grammar, and composed poems on both secular topics and those intended for prayer. Hanagid possessed one of the most complete and valuable collections of Hebrew books.

A contemporary of Shmuel Hanagid, the philosopher and poet Shlomo ibn Gabirol (1021-1055) is regarded as one of the greatest Jewish poets of medieval Spain. During his short life, he wrote many beautiful poems in both Hebrew and Arabic. His philosophical works are well known, and he also composed “piyyutim” (hymns) for the Sabbath, holidays, and fast days, many of which are included in prayer collections—makhzorim. Some of the poems and hymns explore themes of God’s passionate love and the expectation of the Messiah. The pinnacle of his literary work is the ethical-philosophical poem “Keter Malchut” (“Royal Crown”), which is included in the liturgy for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), as well as his philosophical work “Mekor Chaim” (“Source of Life”), noted for its tendency toward Neoplatonic pantheism. His artistic creations are deeply intertwined with his philosophical thought, showcasing the personal qualities of a sensitive poet and a thoughtful philosopher. The extreme tragedy and sublime intonations of his works resonate profoundly with the author’s inner mood.

Abraham ibn Ezra (c. 1090-1165) was a poet, philosopher, grammarian, astronomer, and mathematician who made significant contributions to the development of Jewish culture during his time. He authored various religious and philosophical works, producing profound scientific and grammatical commentaries in the field of biblical exegesis. His literary output enriched medieval Jewish poetry, characterized by its mystical qualities and tragic spirit—likely influenced by his personal family troubles. Alongside these deep poems, he also composed love songs and riddles.

No less merit in the development of Jewish culture is attributed to Abraham's older contemporary, Moshe ibn Ezra (1055-1139). He created numerous poetic works—both secular and religious. Of particular interest is his collection of secular poems, "Tarshish" ("1210 lines"), which is based on the principles of Arabic poetics and consists of ten chapters. In addition to his poetic works, Moshe ibn Ezra was the first in Jewish literature to write a treatise on rhetoric and poetics. Moshe ibn Ezra introduced the concept of homonymous verse into Hebrew poetry, as seen in his collection "Sefer ha-'Anak" ("The Book of the Necklace"), along with other innovations.

Yehuda Halevi (c. 1075–1141) is one of the most prominent figures of the Golden Age of Jewish culture. His work represents the pinnacle of Jewish poetry in Andalusia. He authored both secular and liturgical poetry and diligently studied the Bible. His poems are infused with biblical and philosophical themes, reflecting his deep longing for "Eretz Yisrael" (the Land of Israel), which is vividly expressed in his poems about the homeland. This yearning ultimately inspired him to embark on a journey to Israel in his old age, where he met his end upon his arrival. Yehuda Halevi made innovative changes across many genres and poetic forms, such as the theme of dialogue with the deceased in dirges and the strophic form of ballads. His book "Kuzari," written in Arabic, conveys profound insights into Jewish thought. Yehuda Halevi's poetry showcases a wide range of emotions, with love poems that vary from light flirtation to passionate devotion. Among the approximately 350 "piyutim" that have survived his work, the cycle "Shirei ha-Galut" ("Songs of Exile") holds particular significance.

Thus, as a result of the small review presented in the article, the following conclusion can be drawn: Andalusian Jewish poets, although they began to write samples of Hebrew poetry in the tenth century, taking into account the same genres, themes, form, style, and prosody as the Arab poets wrote, and continued to do so for a long time, almost until their expulsion from Spain, however, in addition to the similarities in Hebrew and Arabic poetry, it is worth emphasizing the main thing that makes Andalusian Jewish poetry distinctive - it could not be a simple imitation of Arabic poetry, especially since Andalusian Jewish poetry was created for a society that had a different history and culture for centuries, had its literary traditions, faithfully defended its religion, and was proud of its achievements.

The Jewish culture of this era was able to creatively celebrate and rework the achievements of an externally non-Jewish culture. Therefore, Hebrew poetry, sharing the ideas and forms of Arabic poetry, brilliantly expressed Jewish ideas, thoughts, and feelings against the backdrop of the diversity and sophistication of the era of Muslim revival. It should be emphasized that the language of medieval Hebrew poetry is exclusively Hebrew. The Jewish authors living in Spain knew Arabic perfectly and wrote many medical, philosophical works, and grammatical treatises in Arabic. They wrote poetry exclusively in Hebrew, which had a great influence on the future development of the Hebrew language.

Poets chose a theme, which was then refined with the help of rhetorical figures, poetic tropes, and sometimes the constant use of biblical unchanged phrases (mosaic style). The rhetoric of this period, the art of eloquence, was given great importance. That is why the rhetorical beauty of any work could awaken feelings that sometimes the content of the text itself did not deserve.

Under the influence of Muslims, the Jews looked at the Bible in a new way and saw in it the perfection of verbal art, therefore, no matter what influence and in what form the

Hebrew verse was transmitted, it always and everywhere (including in Andalusian poetry) preserved the biblical spirit and color.

In conclusion, the Golden Age of Jewish culture in medieval Spain represents a paradigmatic example of cultural synthesis, where Jewish and Arab cultural traditions intersected and influenced each other. This era of cultural exchange profoundly influenced the development of Jewish poetry, resulting in a new type of creative work distinguished by its literary merit and cultural significance.