

THE "WILES OF WOMEN" MOTIF IN THE MEDIEVAL HEBREW LITERATURE OF SPAIN

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THE ROLE OF the Jews in Spain as intermediaries in the transmission of science, literature and philosophy from the Muslim to the Christian world in the Middle Ages is generally known. Yet, while the complete story of that transmission has not yet been adequately told, even less perfectly realized is the extent to which the Jews were creators and originators, and not mere transmitters. Particularly in literature, even that which purports to be translation from the Arabic into Hebrew, the role of the Jewish author was usually closer to what has been termed "redactor" or "narrator" (Gerhardt, 1963, pp. 40-41) than translator.

In spite of the admirable work of a number of scholars, the complete account of the development of medieval Hebrew literature remains to be written. A major chapter in that story must be the genre of literature known in Arabic as *maqāma* and in Hebrew as *maḥberet*.¹

Israel Davidson, that indefatigable scholar of Hebrew poetry to whom all later students are indebted, had some difficulty in defining this type of literature (Ibn Zabara, 1914, introduction, pp. xxx-xxx). Neither mere satire nor only a collection of folk tales, it also includes moral and philosophical instruction, as well as tales calculated to "delight." The *maqāma* originated, appar-

1. The root of the Arabic term is *qam*, and the word itself means "sitting, session" (often rendered "assembly" in English). I wonder if the Hebrew term ("composition" in modern Hebrew) may not be influenced by the Arabic *habar* (a biographical-literary anecdote)?

ently in Muslim Persia, under the influence of the developing schools of Arabic grammar and poetry. According to some scholars, 'Amr b. Baḥr (d. 869 C.E.), known as "al-Jāḥiṣ" (the "goggle-eyed"), was the first to use this style in his "Book of Animals."² Others deny that this work and its imitators really deserve the appellation of *maqāmāt*, however. All agree that the first author of a "real" *maqāma* was Abū -l Fath Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Hamaḍāni (967-1007 C.E.), known as "*Badi' al-Zamān*" ("Wonder of the Age").³

The most famous example of this kind of literature is undoubtedly the compilation known generally as the "Arabian Nights" or "Thousand and One Nights." In addition to this, there is what was certainly the most popular and widely known collection in the medieval Muslim world, the "Assemblies" of Abū Muḥammad al-Qasim ibn Alī al-Ḥariri (1054-1122). He authorized 700 copies of his book to be made in his lifetime, and there were numerous commentaries on it, especially in Muslim Spain. It was freely translated into Hebrew by Judah al-Ḥarizi (d. before 1235), best known for his other literary masterpiece in this style, *Taḥkemoni*.⁴

However, the honor of originating this genre in Hebrew literature belongs apparently to Solomon Ibn Ṣaḡbēl (12th Century). There were, indeed, several authors of this style who preceded al-Ḥarizi. We shall examine some of these in the course of this article, the purpose of which is to discuss one theme: that of the "wiles of women" in this literature.

We should preface this investigation with a few words about the distinctive nature of the Hebrew form of this genre. Davidson (Ibn Zabara, 1914, p. xxxviii), noting that Ibn Zabara (which is the correct form of his name, and not "Zabara") was one of the first Hebrew writers to use rhymed prose, concluded that he made use of "excellent models," the result of "many years of development." In fact, we know of no earlier examples than that of Ibn Ṣaḡbēl, whose style is already as impressive as that of Ibn Zabara. Furthermore, there is no absolute proof that Ibn Zabara was aware of the work of

2. See Nicholson (1956, p. 346), and cf. al-Jāḥiṣ, *Le Livre des Avarès*, tr. Charles Pellat (Paris, 1951).

3. There is an English translation (al-Hamaḍāni, 1915; reprinted 1973) and a partial French translation (*idem*, 1957). A good study of the whole genre of "imaginative literature" in Arabic is that of Mohammed Ferid Ghazi (1957).

4. Nicholson (1956, pp. 329ff), and see also González Palencia (1928, pp. 113-121) for some of the Spanish Muslim authors. Judah al-Ḥarizi's translation has been published (al-Ḥariri, 1951), and his *Taḥkemoni* exists in many editions (English translation Reichert, 1965; 1973). While there is still no critical edition of this important work, Reichert's translation is based on the Mss. as well as other editions.

his predecessor, although the probability may be strong. We must use extreme caution in this question of “influences,” in literature as well as in ideas or any other historical phenomenon.⁵

Since little effort has been made to analyze the use and awareness of literary and other texts by the Jews of medieval Spain, we are very far from being in a position to comment on literary influences. We do not have anything like a clear picture of the extent of their knowledge of Arabic literature, both that produced in Muslim Spain and that from other lands. There is, for example, al-Ḥarizi’s own statement that the *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥariri were widely known among the Jews, in addition to the many references by Moses Ibn Ezra in his work on poetics to many Muslim writers and poets. To this may be added such testimony as the references by Kalonymos b. Kalonymos and Abraham Bedersi to the Sindibad stories, *Kalilah wa-Dimnah*, and the “Arabian Nights.”⁶

As stated above, the role of the Jews in the transmission of literary themes (as well as in other areas) was in no sense that of mere translators or imitators. There is scarcely a single example of “pure translation” from Arabic into Hebrew in medieval Jewish writing. Part of this was due to religious-cultural concerns, so that the adaptation of a work provided an opportunity to infuse it with distinctive Jewish values or literary framework. This was the case, for instance, with the Hebrew version of the Sindibad tales (*Mišley Sendebār*) and *Ben hammelek wəhannazir* (both discussed below). Still more important was the compelling urge to prove the equality, if not superiority, of the Hebrew language to the Arabic and to produce literature in the “holy tongue” that could take its place without shame beside the masterpieces of the Arabic.⁷ To what extent were the Hebrew authors successful in this goal? At the risk of being (perhaps inevitably) accused of chauvinism, I would say that the Hebrew *maqāma* literature, like Hebrew poetry, seems superior in style, wit, and literary cohesiveness to its Arabic sister. However, it is also true that both Arabic and Hebrew writers borrowed heavily from ancient Indian literature, so there can be no question of complete originality in themes. The actual extent of the impact of Indian tales on both Arabic and Hebrew literature is

5. Davidson’s own efforts at identifying the “origin” of many of the tales in Ibn Zabara are at best conjectural (see the criticism of Merriam Sherwood, introduction to Ibn Zabara, 1932, pp. 18–19; to which many additional examples could be added).

6. Both cited by Morris Epstein (1967, pp. 12, 13). Among the many errors made by Epstein, it should be noted that the Jews were not “expelled” from Provence in 1306, or at any other time, as he states (p. 14).

7. The reasons behind this are complex, with far-reaching implications, and there is no room to go into them here. I hope to make this the subject of another study in the near future.

still not fully realized, and claiming no degree of competence in this area whatever, I can only point out a few examples later in this article.

Of particular interest in medieval Hebrew literature is the development of a theme which we may call, borrowing the term from its later manifestation in Spanish literature, the "wiles of women." While a case could be made for the origin of this theme in some of the satirical statements about women in the Bible (e.g., Prov 2:16-19; 5:3-6; etc.), the predominance of this theme in Indian literature demands that it be considered as the chief source. Surprisingly, this theme seems almost totally lacking in Arabic literature (with the exception of the presumed Arabic version of the Sindibad tales, and the introduction of these same stories at a late date into the "Arabian Nights" collection). There is, of course, the seduction theme in certain Arabic epics; the best known probably being that of the story of Umar al-Nu'umân, recorded at length in "Arabian Nights," and the seduction of a Byzantine noble before the battle of Yarmuk, "a deed well-known in al-Andalus." In Spain, there was also the legendary violation of the daughter of Count Julian, which supposedly caused the Muslim invasion of 711.⁸

Although this is not the place to discuss this theme in medieval Spanish literature, the possible Jewish influence cannot be ignored. We will see that the earliest examples of Spanish prose literature bear a strong resemblance to the *maqâma* genre and show what must be regarded as unmistakable signs of acquaintance with this form of literature. While direct knowledge of Arabic has been proven in the case of at least one of these authors, Juan Manuel (nephew of Alfonso X), the predominance of "anti-feminine" elements in medieval Spanish literature generally must surely owe something to contact with Jewish as well as with Arabic literature.

Joseph Ibn Zabara's *Book of Delight* is one of the best known of all the works of medieval Hebrew literature. This offers the first example of our theme in the story of the fox and the leopard (a motif in itself probably derived from the frequent fox and jackal of Indian tales). The fox warns: "Take heed of a woman's counsel, for woman is evil and bitter in spirit and hard. Her heart is of flint, an accursed plague is she in the house. Wise and understanding men heed not their wives, for they are of light mind. The sage hath said, 'Guard against their love; ask their counsel and do the opposite.' Whoso heeds them and follows after them brings it about that both he and they are consumed in the flames" (Ibn Zabara, 1914, p. 22; Hadas' tr., Ibn Zabara, 1932,

8. Marcos Marín (1971, p. 273). On the legends and historical reality of the Muslim invasion of Spain, see Roth (1976).

p. 57). Another story told by the fox of this genre is that of the king and the faithless wife.⁹

Next come several short stories related to Socrates' supposed hatred of women, the source of which has not yet been established. One of these, the story of Socrates seeing a woman hanging from a fig tree, upon which he says “Would that all fruit were the same,” is found later in the medieval *Gesta Romanorum*. It is originally told by Diogenes Laertius; however, the immediate source is probably the story told of (the philosopher) Diogenes in Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq's *Kitāb al-Adāb al-Falāsifa*.¹⁰ Another story concerns this same Diogenes, who saw the inscription “Let no evil enter here” over a door. “And how will the wife enter?” he asked.

Another well-known story in Ibn Zabara's collection is that of the washerwoman and the demon. This story has numerous parallels in European literature. It is found in the *Conde Lucanor* of Juan Manuel (1282–1345), which has been called the first work in the Spanish language to exhibit a real style.¹¹ That style, as we have already said, is none other than the style of *maqāma* literature. The story of *Conde Lucanor* and in Ibn Zabara is quite similar, contrary to the impression given by Sherwood in her introduction to the English translation of Ibn Zabara (1932). The demon is unhappy because he has not been able to bring about any mischief in the town, and the washerwoman sets out to show her ability in this respect. She convinces a virtuous woman of her husband's infidelity, and proposes as a remedy that the wife cut three hairs from her husband's beard with which to make a charm to prevent him from looking at other women. Meanwhile, the washerwoman convinces the husband of his wife's infidelity, and that she and her lover plan to kill him. When he pretends to sleep, his wife comes at him with a razor to cut the hairs; and, assuming that she is going to kill him, he grabs the razor and kills her. In

9. As Davidson noted (Ibn Zabara, 1914, p. li), this story is paralleled in the “Māšālīm šel Šəlomo” (ed. Adolph Jellinek in *Beyt hammidraš* 4: 146–148), to which the following references should be added: Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, VI, 286, note 32; Moses Gaster, *Exempla of the Rabbis* (London, 1924), No. 328; Nissim b. Jacob Ibn Shanin, *Hibbur yafe mehavyḏšū'a* (ed. H. Z. Hirschberg, Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 30–32. In all of these, the story is told of Solomon.

10. Ibn Zabara, 1914, p. 31; *idem*, 1932 (tr. Hadas), p. 66 (cf. the introduction of Sherwood, p. 37). Ḥunayn's work in the Hebrew translation of al-Harizi (Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq, 1896), “Gate Two,” ch. 6, no. 5. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, ed. and tr. R. D. Hicks (Loeb Classical Library) II, 53.

11. González Palencia's introduction to his (abridged) edition of Juan Manuel (1962), p. 16. It is *Exemplo XLII* in ed. Gayangos (Juan Manuel, 1860, pp. 410–411). Unfortunately, it is not in González' edition.

both versions this results in a blood feud with many deaths. I cannot agree with Sherwood, again, that the version in European tales is "less general" than that of Ibn Zabara. The details of Ibn Zabara's account are, if anything, more carefully developed, and have given rise to speculation about the possible historical background of such a feud. Since Ibn Zabara's and Juan Manuel's are, respectively, the first and the second earliest European versions, it would seem not improbable that Juan Manuel borrowed the tale from Ibn Zabara (barring the possibility of an Arabic version, as yet unknown; in any case, the similarity with the Hebrew story is remarkable).

We come now to the major work using this theme, although by no means the best from the point of view of style: the *Minḥat Yehuda*, subtitled *Šone hannašim* ("Hater of Women"), by Judah b. Isaac ha-Levi Ibn Shabbetai.¹² The author was born in 1168, and lived in Toledo and Saragossa (there is no evidence that he was in Burgos, as often stated). He wrote this work at the age of twenty in 1188, revised it in 1208, and wrote the concluding section in 1225.

The introduction begins with the conceit of moral instruction and prophetic inspiration:

The spirit lifted me and stood me on my feet, and I heard one speaking to me, and he instructed me and said to me to arouse my intellect and to take up my discourse, to speak noble words and compose poems, to overcome the mighty; 'and I will be with your mouth and show you what to speak' . . .

This is a familiar device in both Arabic and Hebrew literature; one example is al-Ḥarizi's introduction to *Tahkemoni*, where his personified intellect arouses him from sleep with a prophetic call.¹³

Davidson (1907, p. 9) appears somewhat to have misunderstood the nature of this work. According to him, Ibn Shabbetai was not against women or marriage, rather his work "is as much directed against the woman-hater as against women . . . It is both a warning to the misogynist and a protest against hasty marriage." But this is to misread the satire, which is clearly directed against women in general and *any* kind of marriage (the hero's marriage can hardly be called "hasty"!). Davidson also argued that the appel-

12. Editions: a) s.l.s.a. (Constantinople, ca. 1543); with *Ma'ase bišloša našim*; b) Prague (?), ca. 1600; c) in Ashkenazi (1854), pp. 1-12; d) repeated in Micha Yosef Bin-Gorion, *Mimməqor Yisra'el*, pp. 5, 102-119; and in Schirmann (1956, II, pp. 70-86; partial). Cf. also the corrections by Halberstamm (1871) from a Ms.

13. Cf. Ezek 2:1ff; Reichert (1965, I, p. 30). Cf. also Ibn Saqbel in Schirmann (1956, I, pp. 560-561, ll. 96f).

lative “hater of women” is a sort of secondary title for the work, and not a term applied to the author himself. However, in the conclusion (following here Halberstamm’s Ms.), Ibn Shabbetai signs himself: “Levi and Judah, the enemy of women [*šorer hannašim*], son of Shabbetai ha-Levi, the warner of men.” Nothing could be clearer than that the author meant himself to be taken seriously in his warnings, and that he saw himself (and was so seen by others) as “hater of women.” Davidson also misunderstood the decidedly scatological intent of the warning in the opening of the satire, which he quotes: “Go ye men in a straight line, for all climbing ends in going downward.”¹⁴

There are many historically important statements hidden in the introduction, which cannot detain us here. Suffice it to say that he was satirizing actual conditions, and real people, in Aragon. One of these, Taḥkemoni “from the land of the south” (Castile), succeeded in escaping that court. He had a son named Zerah, who is the hero of the tale and the *alter ego* of Ibn Shabbetai himself. The “angel” who appears informs him that, though the sin of those people from whom he fled is great, “their women deceived their hearts; for who can loosen the bonds which women make?” (Ashkenazi, 1854, f. 2b; Schirmann, 1956, II, 71). He begins to catalogue the deceits of women from Eve: not because of the serpent but because of her guile was her husband exiled from his home, and even the serpent was banished because of her. Jacob and his children were pursued by Laban because of the teraphim stolen by Rachel. He also mentions Dinah (Genesis 34), and the golden calf (Exod 32:2), which was made from the jewelry of women. Abraham was blessed, because of his good deeds, by not having a daughter!

Taḥkemoni then gives his son his parting testimonial advice: “Do not take a wife . . . you dress her in finery and fill her with delicacies and another man lies with her . . . The boor who is married is made to be buried; the wise one from woman guards his soul, and lets an ass or an ox fall into that hole.” Furthermore, he advises, “Meet with a bereaved bear or join the wolves of the forest, but not with a woman in the bedroom.” Parodying Mic 7:6, he says: “The enemies of a man are the women of his house” (Ashkenazi, f. 3b; not in Schirmann’s excerpt).

Zerah and three friends escape from the perils of women to an ideal land of pleasures, where he continues to preach the evils of women. However, the women complain of his success in persuading young men to stay away from them. Finally, a shrewd woman suggests that a girl be found for him who is both beautiful and well versed in culture (*adāb*) and wisdom. (To be fair, Ibn

14. Green (1968, I, 55) has discussed a similar pun in the *Libro de buen amor*.

Shabbetai here places in the mouth of the women complaints against men that almost balance his charges against women.)

Zerah then has two dreams, which his friends explain as a forewarning about his impending marriage ("with the burial of an ass you will be buried"—perhaps the first use of this later popular expression in Hebrew literature). Angered at their interpretation, Zerah drives his friends away from him (Ashkenazi, 1854, f. 6a). Meanwhile, the enchantress (Kozbi; "lie, deceit") brings the beautiful and talented maiden to him. After seeing her and hearing her poems, he declares his love for her and agrees to marry. There follows a parody of the *ketubah* (marriage contract). Among some of the vulgar witticisms here is the promise of a dowry of a hundred foreskins to the bride.

However, on the marriage night Kozbi exchanges the lovely girl for an ugly woman (a common theme in such tales). Evening comes "and behold Rispa ["ground, floor"] in the place of Ayyala Šəluha ["hind set loose," in this case the name of a girl; cf. Isa 3:24], and instead of well-set hair, baldness." In a possible allusion to the alchemist's search for a means of turning base metal into gold, he puns: "The silver is gone and the impurity remains; there is no gold and no beauty!"

His new wife presents him with a list of demands, of some interest, incidentally, as showing the kinds of household objects used:

. . . vessels of silver and of gold, gowns, earrings and bracelets and veils, a house and dwelling, chairs and candelabra, table and spoons, pestle and seeds, a coverlet and spindle, a mat and washbasin, basket and distaff, a pot and a bottle and a kettle, a mortar and broom and kerchief, a pan, furnace and stove, a barrel for water and goblets and scoops and vessels and bowls, scent-boxes and cloaks, veils and turbans and festive dresses and linen garments, nose-rings and mirrors, handbags and crescents [probably ornamental headdresses], amulets and ornaments, woven linen and fine linen, headdresses, rings and headbands, anklets and anklebands—and besides all these: lovely clothes for the Sabbath, festivals and holidays . . . (Ashkenazi, 1854, f. 9b; Schirmann, 1956, II, 82)

This is not a mere laundry list of goodies; the parody is immediately obvious when compared with a similar list in Isa 3:18–23 (note also verses 16, 17 and 12). The incongruous juxtaposition of items also adds to the humor.

She adds that all this will only satisfy her until she gives birth, when he will have to feed all her relatives, who no doubt will come to visit, and provide servants and nursemaids to clean up (literally, to eat and drink) the infant's excrement.

His friends now conveniently reappear to console him (the motif is derived, of course, from Job). One of them laments Zerah's fate in a parody of a typical lamentation poem for the dead.

The author now enters the story himself (a unique device until then unknown in Hebrew literature, though not in Arabic; not until Juan Ruiz' *Libro de buen amor* did Spanish literature make use of this).¹⁵ Addressing his own lines of reproach and pity to his character, Ibn Shabbetai says: "I am like you; feminization has given you panic and 'taken away the covering of Judah'" (cf. Isa 22:8); i.e., the author has also suffered from women. He ends with a couplet:

Ah, Zerah, woe to you and woe to me
 let us weep and lament together
 The evil fate that pursues like an enemy
 and placed us as slaves in the hands of women.

(Ashkenazi, 1854, f. 10b; Schirmann, 1956, II, 86)

Finally, following his friends' advice, Zerah takes his case to the people and begs to be allowed to divorce his wife. Some are in favor and some are opposed, until it is decided to take the case to the great king (Alfonso X) for judgment; he who is so wise that "all the kings of the West" listen to him. They go to the king, "seated on the throne of his kingdom, the captains of the soldiers before him, and all the wise men of the generation who seek teaching from his mouth, for he is an angel of the Lord of Hosts. He acquits the innocent and condemns the guilty and the poor nation [the Jews] he saves." These words can fit none other than Alfonso "the Wise," who was known, of course, for his friendly relations with the Jews and to whom all sorts of European scholars did come for instruction. Ibn Zabara dedicated his book to Alfonso's *almoxarif* (= Ar. *al-mūšārīf*, "official," usually a tax-collector), Abraham al-Fakhar.

At the hearing before the king the charge is directed not at Zerah, but at the author himself (who, after all, was responsible for the story). He is accused of encouraging husbands to divorce their wives. The author here again enters his story and pleads his own case. "What shall I say," he argues, "this Tahkemoni never was, and Zerah never married Rišpa; and of these who are now speaking, not a one of them ever existed, for I created them in my heart, and on a base of deceit was their foundation poured. For I love my wife and children more than all who came before me" (Ashkenazi, 1854, f. 11b;

15. Cf. Castro (1948, pp. 320, 324); Green (1968, I, p. 40).

not in Schirmann, 1956). The king is pleased with the story and he and all the courtiers laugh at it. Ibn Shabbetai is given 300 silver coins and five changes of clothing as a reward, and made a daily guest at the table of the king.

This work had a significant impact on later Hebrew literature. It was quoted, without reference to the author, by Menahem ha-Meiri of Provence in his commentary on Proverbs; it most certainly influenced al-Ḥarizi, even in his choice of the title, perhaps; it called forth a refutation by Yeda'yah Bedersi (*Ohev našim*, "Lover of Women"), and by an otherwise unknown Isaac; and influenced Immanuel of Rome.

We will briefly examine Isaac's rebuttal, *Ezrat našim* ("Aid of Women"), which is not entirely devoid of literary merit, although lacking the humor and refined style of Ibn Shabbetai's work. It was written in 1210, just two years after the latter had completed his revised version, and dedicated to the great Toledan courtier Todros Abulafia (not the poet of that name), father of the chief rabbi of Castile, Meir ha-Levi Abulafia.¹⁶

Isaac, too, opens his work with a prophetic "call," in which he is instructed to reply to the "sin" or "sin offering" of Judah; a pun on the title of Ibn Shabbetai's work ("Offering of Judah"). The author informs us that he had studied poetry since he was a boy, and he was indeed still young when he wrote this work. He studied proverbs and riddles "by the hundreds and thousands," and among them those of "a man skilled in his craft and in the holy language which grew up with him; there is no deliverer besides him." There is no doubt that none other than Ibn Shabbetai himself is meant, and al-Ḥarizi later gave him similar praise. But his faults exceed his virtues: "like one who elevates himself by degrading his neighbor, for I know his manner." Isaac offers a possible motive behind the composition of Ibn Shabbetai's work which has hitherto been overlooked: "And Judah still spitting [or: "running with an unclean discharge;" Lev 15:3] came to warn a man, seasoned like himself, about the Gentile wife he had taken; but he did not consider or understand that not all women or trees or stoves are alike" and so prohibited all marriage (see Halberstamm, 1871, pp. 42-43).

Announcing his theme, Isaac says: "Behold, I come in this my tale to stir up love, and to make a path in the mighty waters, a straight way without stumbling, and to 'choose the son of the beloved' [i.e., love; cf. Deut 21:16]; to proclaim that woman is wisdom and goodness to whom no pearls can be compared."

16. Text ed. Halberstamm (1871). Ibn Shabbetai also dedicated his second *maqāma*, *Milḥemet hahokma wəḥa'ošer* (Constantinople, 1543, etc.; repeated in editions of *Ben hammelek wəḥannazir*) to Todros Abulafia.

Like Ibn Shabbetai, he builds his story around a father, Abšalom, and his son, Hoḇab. But when his father is dying, the son is ordered to take a wife in this story, and indeed he falls in love with a girl named Rachel and marries her. Her relatives resent him, however, and in conspiracy with an official of the city arrange to have her abducted and delivered to the official. She convinces him (implausibly) to take her case to the king, who restores her to her husband and has the wicked minister killed.

There are only a couple of sections in al-Ḥarizi's *Tahkemoni* dealing with our theme. In Gate Six, Heman, the hero of the book, tells of an old hag who enticed him into marrying a beautiful girl for whom he committed himself to a large dowry. When the wedding night arrives, his bride has been exchanged:

And lo! her face was of fright and her voice was as the sound of thunder. Her figure was like Jeroboam's calf (1 Kgs 12:28) and her mouth was like Balaam's ass, and the breath from her nose was putrid. The natural bloom had fled from her cheeks as though the devil had daubed them with blackness, and worked them with coals, so that I thought her of the daughters of Ham. But if her visage was blacker than coal, her hair was white, and her days had waxed old—and her lips protruded lightly from above [a slight mistranslation; literally, “her lips curled upwards,” cf. Deut 1:41–N.R.] and her teeth were as the teeth of wolves and bears. And her eyes were the eyes of scorpions. (Tr. Reichert, 1965, I, p. 124; cf. Schirmann, 1956, II, p. 120)

We immediately recognize here the influence of Ibn Shabbetai. This becomes even more pronounced with the introduction of a list of items which Heman asks his wife if she has brought with her (similar to the list of Ibn Shabbetai referred to above), and her reply that she has brought only broken and worthless objects.

Gate Forty-Two is in the form of a dispute between a man and woman (this style, which may be called the “debate” genre, was very popular in medieval Hebrew writing; it is therefore certainly incorrect, as Huizinga (1954, p. 297) would have it, that the hack French poet of the late Fourteenth Century, Guillaume de Machaut, “invented” this form, which was already well known also in Spanish literature). Nevertheless, this dispute has little literary merit, consisting merely of exchanges of insults.

The Hebrew version of *Kalilah wa-Dimnah*, by the Thirteenth-Century writer Jacob b. (or Ibn) El'azar of Toledo, has certain examples of the deceit and bad character of women (cf., e.g., the excerpt in Schirmann, 1956, II, pp. 233–34). Of far more significance and of better literary quality are the stories in one of the best-known Hebrew works, *Ben hammelek wəhannazir* (“The Prince and the Dervish”). Not at all a translation, but rather an adaptation by

Abraham ibn Hasdai (Thirteenth Century, Barcelona) of an Arabic version of the Barlaam and Joasaf story concerning the youthful Buddha.¹⁷ This story had a widespread influence on medieval literature, not only because of the misconception that the heroes were Christian "saints" (whose relics were actually exhibited in various churches!), but because of its literary and moral qualities. Just to mention a few of the outstanding works of medieval Spanish literature alone which reflect this influence: Juan Manuel's *El libro de los estados*; his *El Conde Lucanor*; the *Libro del gentil y de los tres sabios* of Ramon Lull, as well as his *Libro de las bestias*; the *Libro de los gatos*; the *Castigos e documentos*, attributed to Sancho IV; *El caballero Cifar*; the *Libro de los enxemplos* of Clemente Sánchez de Vercial; and, in the post-medieval era, Lope de Vega's "Barlaam y Josafat" and Calderon's *La vida es sueño*. In Hebrew literature, Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari* was definitely influenced by it.

Of interest to our topic is "Gate Thirty" at the end. The *nazir* gives the following advice to the prince:

My son, be careful of the deceit of women and their infidelity and cunning ways, for great is their capriciousness. Let it suffice for their disgrace that which every sage and intelligent person has formulated sayings and proverbs about them. One of these said, 'Go after lions and snakes, and not after women.' One said, 'The beauty of a man is in thought and the thought of a woman is on beauty.' And another said, 'Women are the bonds of Satan.' Another said, 'Greed, cowardice and folly are the bad qualities of a man, but the best of a woman.' . . .

It is told that a respected merchant had a lovely wife whom he loved very much, but she had eyes for his slave and had great desire and love for him. And the days passed in pleasure of their sweet love. The woman said to the slave, 'Beloved, I am afraid that your master may suddenly come upon us and see us and forever break up our association. Therefore, hear my suggestion. Take a piece of wood and make an image of me. Decorate it with ornaments of gold, and dress it in fine garments like me, and place it in your bedroom on your bed. When your master returns, I know that he will seek me and not find me, and he will call to you, but do not answer.' So the slave did all that his mistress commanded him, and she went to her father's house. At midnight, her husband returned from his journey and entered his house. He sought his wife but did not find her. A spirit of jealousy came upon him, and he thought her to be with the slave. Alarmed, he went to the room where the slave was; finding the door closed, he looked in through a hole and saw the image lying

17. Gimaret (1971) deals with the sources (he also published an edition of the Arabic text, Beirut, 1972); cf. also Wallis Budge (1923). The most convenient edition of the Hebrew version is that of Habermann (1950).

with the slave like two lovers embracing and kissing. Going to the door in great wrath, he broke it and jumped on the slave and beat him. ‘Woe to you, traitor!’ he yelled, ‘Do you think to assault the mistress with me in the house?’ [cf. Esth 7:8] The slave replied, ‘Far be it from us, master, far be it from us—behold, my mistress is in her father’s house; and I made this image to be a companion for me instead of entreating you to allow me to marry, lest you not desire it. . . . [After requesting pardon from his slave, the husband’s “heart was secure”] and he no longer took heed of them, to the point that when the two of them were together, he thought it was the image and paid no attention. And this continued many days. (Habermann, 1950, pp. 193–195)

One of the best examples of literary style and satire in medieval Hebrew literature, famous also because of its profuse illustrations in numerous manuscripts and editions, is the *Məšal haqqadmoni* (“Parable of the Ancient”) of Isaac Ibn Sahulah (b. 1244, lived in Guadalajara). One of the stories is about a Muslim woman who falls in love with a Christian boy and seduces him one night while her husband is at prayer. She arranges to meet the boy again next morning while her husband is again at the mosque. She convinces her pious husband, with whom she has also meanwhile had intercourse, of her vow not to attend services because of the licentious talk of the other women! “Blessed be God who placed this in your heart,” he exclaims. “Such a one is truly called ‘Woman,’ for from ‘Man’ is she taken” (cf. Gen 2:23). The boy, having meanwhile lost all his money in gambling, decides to flee the city, and the woman goes with him, taking all her husband’s possessions. The “moral” of this story is actually stated as: don’t be over-pious!¹⁸

Schirmann has published excerpts from a manuscript of a *maqāma* which he thinks (I believe with good reason, and other grounds could be added to those he gives) to be by Ibn Sahulah. One of these stories concerns Abino’am, a ‘hater of women’—interestingly, also the name of one of the three friends in Ibn Shabbetai’s work. He contends that “one who takes a wife increases his pain and multiplies his grief and sorrow; for a wife is to her husband a pit of destruction, a plague that breaks forth, and a consuming fire” (Schirmann, 1958). One of the stories he tells to his friends is similar to our previous tale, and concerns the wife of a pious man who had a lover. She poisons her husband and lives with her lover on her husband’s wealth; but when he grows old, she poisons him as well.

The theme of the widow who quickly recovers from her “grief” is a common one. One such tale is told by En Maimon (probably Hayyim b.

18. There are numerous editions of this work; I cite the excerpt in Schirmann (1956, II, pp. 367–377).

Abraham) Gallipapa (late Fourteenth Century). "The widow woman, dark or light, lean or fat, a fire of passion burns in her stomach and Satan stands beside her to tempt her." She mourns for the prescribed period, and as soon as it is over goes out to find another husband.¹⁹

Vidal Benveniste (de la Caballeria), famous poet and a participant in the Tortosa disputation, who later converted to Christianity, wrote some epigrams expressing hostile views on women:

A contentious woman answered a man with insolence and anger—
All of her deeds bear witness that she from man was taken.

This is reminiscent of the expression in Ibn Sahulah's *Māṣal haqqadmoni* (above), except that there it was used as a (sarcastic) compliment and here as an insult: her behavior is "mannish." His second epigram gives this advice:

Do not listen to the suggestions of women,
Do not incline your heart after their ways.
And if you would follow my advice,
Ask women and do the opposite. (Schirmann, 1956, II, 601)

This, as will be recognized, is taken directly from Ibn Zabara.

The "Sindibad" stories were known in the Muslim world at least by the Ninth Century, and passed into European literature in various versions ("Seven Sages of Rome," etc.). The Hebrew version, *Mišley Sendebār*, has received a fine critical edition and English translation (Epstein, 1967). But it must be mentioned that, unfortunately, the editor's theories about the work need to be treated with the greatest caution. There is not the slightest basis for his assumption (p. 35) that the Hebrew is the *original* version of the tradition. It is, obviously, another typical Jewish "reworking" of the (lost) Arabic text, which draws heavily on Hunayn Ibn Ishāq's treatise (a fact not heretofore noted), as well as the Esther framework. It is difficult to date the Hebrew version, but it is perhaps of the Thirteenth Century (at the earliest) and probably originates from Spain or Provence.

There is one story in the Hebrew that has no parallel in other versions.²⁰ This is the story of the woman suspected of infidelity by her husband, who

19. These *maqāmāt* were originally thought to be by Ibn Zabara (cf. Davidson, 1907, p. 5, and Ibn Zabara, 1904). However, Davidson corrected this identification (Ibn Zabara, 1932). Cf. Schirmann (1956, II, pp. 547ff).

20. Epstein erroneously asserted that there are three "new stories" (1967, pp. 22ff), but in fact, only one of these is new.

offers to swear to her innocence. On the way to take the oath, she slips and is supported by her lover (according to a prearranged plan), thus enabling her to swear that no man other than this has touched her. Epstein (1967, p. 23; cf. pp. 253–257) correctly pointed out the similarity, at least superficially, with the "Mouth of Truth" device associated with the medieval legendary Virgil. However, the real origin of this story, almost verbatim, was overlooked by him and is again to be found in the Indian collection *Sukasaptati* (Tale 16; cf. Mathur, 1971, pp. 64–66. There were, of course, other earlier English translations of this collection).

The entire *Sendebār* collection actually concerns the devious ways of women.²¹ Briefly, the framework of the story is this: the king has a son whom he seeks to have educated and entrusts to *Sendebār* for instruction. The boy learns from the stars that if he speaks during the seven days before his twentieth birthday, he will die. This prevents him from displaying his true knowledge to his father, but one of the king's "maidens" offers to try her luck at getting him to speak. She tries this by attempting to seduce him, but he modestly covers his eyes. Fearing that he will tell the king of her actions, she tears her clothes and informs the king that the prince tried to rape her (Epstein, 1967, pp. 81–87; cf. Keller, 1956, pp. 20–21).

This, of course, reflects the familiar story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. (This theme was overlooked by Epstein, but Schwarzbaum, 1961, p. 270, gives detailed references; needless to say, there can be no question of the ancient Egyptian story influencing *Sendebār*, however. Schwarzbaum seems unaware that the Joseph legend was fully developed in Arabic literature.)

One of the most amusing of all the stories is that of the confused parrot.²² Briefly, a jealous husband bought a parrot and put it in his wife's bedroom to report to him everything it observes. The parrot reports the actions of the wife and her lover, but the next night the wife decides to confuse the parrot. She drips water on the cage with a sponge and flashes the light of a candle in a mirror. When asked what happened that night, the parrot complains that he saw and heard nothing because of the thunder, lightning and rain. The man accuses the parrot of deceit, since there had been no storm, and kills it.²³

The story of the husband and wife who swore an oath of fidelity is

21. Keller has aptly given to his translation of the Spanish version the title *The Book of the Wiles of Women* (see Keller, 1953 and 1956).

22. Epstein (1967, pp. 103–111); Keller (1953, pp. 22–23). It should be noted that the parrot was the Indian symbol of wisdom, and the "hero" of the *Sukasaptati* tales. (Surprisingly, this tale is not in that collection, however.)

23. Cf. the version of this story in *Thousand and One Nights* (Burton's tables, 139b). It probably entered there from the *Sindibad* stories.

common to most versions. The husband goes away on a trip, and a young man lusts after the wife until he becomes ill (the physical and mental illness brought about by love is a common theme in Arabic literature; this element is practically missing in the Spanish version—this type of illness is not at all like the “*loco amor*” of the *Libro de buen amor*). An old woman offers to cure him for a price, and buys a dog which she takes to the wife, feeding it on the way with a heavily spiced mixture so that it begins to cry. The lady asks the cause of this strange behavior, and the old woman explains that it was transformed from a woman who refused the desires of a young man. Taking the hint, the lady begs that the would-be lover be brought to her. However, the old woman cannot find him, and decides to bring any man, just so she gets her price. The man she chances upon is the lady’s own husband, who is outraged upon finding that the whore he is offered is his own wife. Cleverly, the wife pretends to have known all along that her husband would be brought to her, and accuses him of planning infidelity.²⁴ Again, this story comes from the Indian *Sukasaptati* collection, and has many later parallels.²⁵

The story of the old woman who deceived a virtuous lady into committing adultery is another widely known tale (Epstein, 1967, pp. 169–177; Keller, 1956, pp. 34–35; cf. Aarne-Thompson, No. 1543). A young man lusts after a married lady and seeks the help of an old woman (the ubiquitous old woman so popular in many of these tales left its mark on Spanish literature as well; most obviously in the *converso* Fernando de la Roja’s famous play *Celestina*). She advises him to buy a cloak from the husband, which she then takes back and hides under a cushion in the lady’s home. Her husband discovers it there and is convinced that the young man had returned to seduce his wife. Angered, he sends her from the house. The old woman offers to take her to a man who can give her a charm to restore her husband’s love (the man, of course, is the young lover).

Most famous of all, perhaps is the tale of the woman whose husband leaves for battle. Her lover then sends his boy to tell her he is coming to her, and she seduces the boy. When the lover comes, she hides the boy in the inner room while she again makes love with her lover. Then they see the husband returning, so she sends her lover to stand outside with sword drawn and yelling curses directed at the “runaway” boy (who is still hiding). When her

24. Epstein (1967, pp. 123–142); Keller (1956, pp. 30–32). This is the famous “Weeping Bitch” motif (Aarne and Thompson, 1961, No. 1515); cf. also Moses Gaster, *Exempla of the Rabbis*, p. 124 (No. 73).

25. Tale 2, pp. 15–16, and Tale 3, pp. 19–20. Cf. the extensive literature in Schwarzbaum (1962) 22: 24–28. It is surprising that Schwarzbaum was not aware of the Indian collection. This should also be added to the Aarne-Thompson index.

husband comes in, she explains that she is hiding the poor boy from his irate master.²⁶

Another tale involves a man who desires to eat sugar with his “rice.”²⁷ He sends his wife to buy it for him, and she is seduced by the shopkeeper, who instructs his boy to replace the sugar with dirt. When asked for an explanation of the dirt, she quickly tells her husband that she was pushed in the street and the sugar fell into the dirt. This, too, is taken almost directly from the Indian collection; except that in the original, the wife plots to meet her lover by going out to buy “*ghee*” (see note 27) and deliberately covers herself with dust and brings back a handful of dust, claiming to have lost the money in the dirt (Epstein, 1967, pp. 197–203, not in the Spanish version; cf. *Sukasaptati*, Tale 14 [Mathur, 1971, pp. 59–60]).

Finally, there is the story of the wise man who set out to write the wiles of women. He is brought to the governor of the city, who, seeing the man is ill, sends him to his wife for food. She entices him into bed with her and begins to scream until her husband comes (again, the Joseph motif). The man falls on the floor in a faint and she explains that he choked on the food. After the husband leaves, satisfied, the man admits that he never saw such cunning (Epstein, 1967, pp. 278–283; Keller, 1956, pp. 39–41; this tale, too, has some similarity to *Sukasaptati*, Tale 12 [Mathur, 1971 pp. 53–56]).

In comparing the Spanish and Greek versions of this tale with the Hebrew, Epstein correctly noted the superiority of the Hebrew from the point of view of style and credibility (Epstein, 1967, pp. 26–30). The same may be said for the whole of the Hebrew version in comparison with the Spanish. The Hebrew version of the tales is both more elaborate and fully developed, best fitting the characterization of a “novella,” i.e., a unified story with a developed plot; while the *Libro de los engaños* is at best a weakly connected series of mini-stories. It would be difficult to argue that the Spanish version was in any way derived from the Hebrew (the other way around is out of the question; there is no instance of medieval Hebrew literature derived from the Spanish).²⁸ Un-

26. Epstein (1967, pp. 219–227); Keller (1956, pp. 25–26). This, too, originates in the Indian *Sukasaptati*, Tale 27, (Mathur, 1971, pp. 96–97). See Schwarzbaum (1962, 22: 21–22), whose question about the possible Indian origin of the story is now resolved in the affirmative.

27. On the difficulty of this term, see the notes in Epstein, 1967, p. 196 (text). This may reflect confusion in the transmission of the original Indian term, *ghee* (“clarified butter”).

28. The one exception is the anonymous (and certainly post-Expulsion) Hebrew translation of the first two *exempla* on friendship of the *Disciplina clericalis*, published under the title *Seper Hanok* in the collection known as *Dibrey hayyamim šel Moše Rabbenu* (Constantinople, 1516) and repeated with a Portuguese translation by Moses Amzalak (Lisbon, 1928), and by Habermann (see *Seper Hanok*, 1951).

doubtedly, both borrowed from a common Arabic source, which the Hebrew writer refashioned in a somewhat "Jewish" framework, whereas the less-skilled Spanish author stuck more closely to his source.

We have now to consider one final collection, which is not within the confines of Hebrew literature as such, having been written by a *converso*, and in Latin. However, it is of importance as being perhaps the earliest example of the influence of our theme in Spanish literature, and in showing some remarkable similarities to some of our sources. This is the famous *Disciplina clericalis* by Petrus Alfonsus (Moses ha-Sefardi, b. 1062). Prior to his conversion, he was physician to Alfonso I of Aragon, and was baptized in 1106, taking the double names of Petrus (Peter) and Alfonsus (in honor of the king). His collection of tales and sayings probably had more influence on European literature of the following centuries than any other single work.²⁹

Even considering the splendid research of Schwarzbaum, the sources of this work have not yet received a full investigation, and it is impossible at this stage even to discuss the possible Jewish influences on the work. However, it is interesting that this work already had some examples of the "anti-feminine" theme.

Exemplum No. 8 ("De voce bubonis") is not a tale, but some sayings about women; e.g., "A certain philosopher said to his son: Follow a scorpion, a lion, a dragon; but do not follow an evil woman." This is very similar to the proverb preserved in *Ben hammelek wəhannazir* (quoted above), with the addition of a dragon under the influence of Christian mythology (see the note in Cejador, 1967, p. 3, note 3).

"A certain disciple said to his master: I have read in the books of the philosophers that a man must guard himself from the wiles of a perverse woman. Solomon warns of this also in Proverbs." He then asks instruction in these things, but the teacher at first fears to let him read his verses on the lascivious ways of women. However, the disciple assures him that the Proverbs of Solomon and other wise writings are a sure safeguard against his corruption (Petrus Alfonsus, 1948, pp. 24–26; tr. pp. 117–119; cf. Schwarzbaum, 1962, 22:17–18).

There follow several tales concerning the "wiles of women," e.g., the woman whose husband returns with an injured eye while her lover is with her. She covers his good eye with plaster, thus preventing him from seeing her

29. The best edition is that of González Palencia, 1948, with introduction and a Spanish translation. There is an English translation by Joseph Jones and John E. Keller, *The Scholar's Guide* (Toronto, 1969), which unfortunately I have not seen. Schwarzbaum (1961-63) is essential for the motifs.

lover. The next is of a woman left in her mother-in-law's house while her husband is away. Her husband returns while her lover is there, and her mother-in-law helps her to spread out a sheet to show her husband, behind which the lover makes his escape (*ibid.*, pp. 27–28; tr. pp. 121–122, 202–204).

Exemplum No. 11 is the Sindibad story of the husband who returns and finds one lover with sword drawn outside the house and the other concealed inside (the version here differs somewhat from either the Hebrew or the Spanish). Exemplum 13 is the “weeping bitch” story, also from the Sindibad cycle, but lacking the ending where the old woman brings the husband to his own wife (*ibid.*, pp. 28–30 and pp. 32–34; tr. pp. 122–124, p. 204, pp. 126–129). Exemplum 14, unparalleled in Jewish sources but with numerous parallels in Indian and Arabic literature, is the story of the jealous husband locked out by a scheming wife (*ibid.*, pp. 35–38; tr. pp. 130–133). The tale was again used by the *Arcipreste de Talavera* and also in the *Libro de los enxemplos* (No. 235).³⁰

One of the most frequently told tales in European literature (Chaucer, Boccaccio, Jacques de Vitry, etc.), and which served recently as the theme of an excellent film cartoon, is that of Exemplum 35: the wife who deceives her husband in the top of a pear tree with her lover. In the *Disciplina* version, the husband's sight is restored by Jupiter, and the deceitful woman gets out of her predicament by saying that Mercury told her to meet someone in the top of the tree in order to restore her husband's sight. This tale, too, originates in the *Sukasaptati* collection (Tale 29, with similarities to Tale 13); except that in that story the wife has her lover climb the tree when the husband comes.³¹

It is certain, of course, that the *Disciplina clericalis* had a far greater impact on medieval and post-medieval Spanish literature than any possible influence which Hebrew literature might have exerted on the Spanish. However, it is interesting that this first example of the use of the theme of the “wiles of women” in literature in Spain was from the pen of an author of Jewish origin, and shows definite evidence of contact with the same sources which were utilized by Hebrew writers.

It would be erroneous to draw conclusions about the real status of women, or attitudes to them, in Spanish Jewish society from these literary themes. (In fact, just as women in general in medieval Spain enjoyed an equality and legal

30. Cf. also D. P. Rotunda in *Romanic Review* (1935) 26: 121–127.

31. Mathur (1971, pp. 100–101 and pp. 57–58). Petrus Alfonsus (1948, pp. 230–232; not in the Latin). Cf. Schwarzbaum 22: 340–342. The Spanish version attributed to Petrus Alfonsus really combines the motifs of Aarne-Thompson (1961, nos. 1355 and 1423).

protection hardly found in any other country, so Jewish women had a great deal of independence; many of them excelled in business and medicine, but that is the subject for another study.) Nevertheless, one gets the impression that not all of this literature was merely satire. Ibn Shabbetai's warnings, especially, were real enough; and as we have seen, may have been directed against the dangers of intermarriage, which was actually quite prevalent in Spain and other countries in the Middle Ages. As literature, however, these works were intended to delight and amuse as much as to warn. They are but one pattern, although a very important one, in the very pleasing tapestry that is medieval Hebrew literature.

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