The treasures of the Cairo Genizah, the bulk of which is deposited at the University of Cambridge, have immeasurably enriched our knowledge of the Mediterranean societies and cultures in the Middle Ages. Among the wide range of subjects covered by the Genizah, Mediaeval Hebrew poetry is undoubtedly one of the most important topics, offering to the student of this genre thousands of ‘old and new’ poems in Hebrew and Judaeo-Arabic, which were composed by well-known and anonymous poets who lived in Spain, North Africa and the Near East between the 10th and 13th centuries. The structures and styles of these poems usually followed in the footsteps of Arab poets who devised a system of rigid metres and rhyming. Nevertheless, many Hebrew poems deviated from the rules of Arabic composition and adopted a more flexible structure. Among the poetic genres of Medieval Hebrew poetry one finds the muwaššah (Heb. שיר אזור) i.e. a strophic poem which consists of a few stanzas (normally between four and six) and rhymes that are repeated in each of the stanzas “internally and externally”.

During my work on the Genizah documents I stumbled upon the following poem (T-S AS 121.215) of which two of its stanzas i.e. the second and third, appear in the second part of the collection of Love Poems by Moshe ben Yaʿaqov Ibn Ezra (circa 1065–1135):
The equivalent stanzas as published by Schirmann 1954–56, I, 369 – 370

Not in Schirmann and Brody

(For textual comments, see Appendix 2)

The following English version is a free and rough translation of the poem, focusing on its contents rather than attempting to provide an artistic rendering:

I am weary to bear my feelings for an enemy
Who slanders me and I am helpless as no one
Understands his desire for a quarrel (?)
While inciting me to sin (?)

I will not forget all my life
The night he lay on my side, in my bed,
On my luxurious coverlet. He kissed me till morning
And suckled me the juice of his mouthSecret etc.

The day I yearned for him (lit. my eye died) and (his) voice
Made my ear tingle as I used sorcery (?) thus committing a great
Sin. By my honour! (lit. By my ‘whiteness’) Why does my ear tingle?
I wonder if my beloved still remembers me

A physical description of the document

The fragment, classmarked T-S AS 121.215, is one leaf written on recto,
measuring 8.5 cm x 12.7 cm. It contains three stanzas in Hebrew, while each
 stanza consists of four lines instead of five in Brody’s and Schirmann’s editions.
The last two lines of the third stanza end in one word in Hebrew, one word in
Judaeo-Arabic and a rhymed ḫarǧa (i.e. the ending of the muwaššah),\(^5\) written in
Arabic characters.

The metre used by the poet is ---v---,\(^6\) while the rhymes are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza</th>
<th>Rhyme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>ABCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>DECC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>FGCC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of the ‘re-arrangement’ of the poem, in each stanza there is:

a. an internal rhyme in the sixth syllable: In the first stanza (הכילה – героתי
opolitan, חלילא – זרי אורד), while in the third stanza (עין עון עון).
b. an external rhyme in the three stanzas occurs also in the sixth syllable: in
the first two stanzas (המדוני – הנידוני, נשקני – הניקני), while in the last stanza
(i.e. in the ḫarǧa in Arabic) the rhyme is in the eighth syllable and is also
ending in the syllable “ני”.

At the end of the two first stanzas, after the rhyming syllable, we find the words
‘סוד וג’ which probably refer to the beginning words of the poem as appearing in
Brody’s and Schirmann’s editions: סוד וברת שמים/גלו נחלי עיני.\(^7\)

Orthography

The handwriting is very clear, using the oriental letter and the text is fully
vocalized, though inconsistently using the *plene* spelling. Thus the word נלאתי
is spelt defectively, while the words נשוא, יהלוך, בוקר, ניחשתי, בורב
are written *plene*.

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5 See e.g. Stern 1974:33–41.
7 See Schirmann 1954–56, I, 369. See also Schirmann 1996:248, fn. 339. These lines
are a refrain, which is repeated after each stanza, except the final.
The vocalization is usually in accordance with the grammatical rules, except the words אַשָּׁבָה and חַלָּדִי where the segol and patah are interchangeable and which, in our version, is vocalized with hataf-patah. The vowel of the ה in the word הָנִידוּנִי seems to have been omitted by the scribe, either inadvertently or deliberately. The scribe has made two mistakes and amended them: in the fourth line of the first stanza the word for ‘sin’ is spelt חֵטֶא and an א over the word, while the correct version חֵטָא seems to appear in the margin on the right side of the page, partly illegibly. The second orthographic error occurs in the second line of the third stanza where the Judaeo-Arabic word צָאַלְלָה is crossed out and replaced by the Hebrew word צָלָלָה which is written on top of the crossed out word.

Language and style

The language and style of the poem, like all Mediaeval Hebrew poetry, are based on the Bible, that is to say, on the morphology, syntax and lexicon of biblical Hebrew, including many expressions and idioms that are taken from various books of the Old Testament verbatim. This fact demonstrates the poet’s comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. However a few deviations from the original text are found in our version of the poem. The word המדוני which is not found in the Bible, though the pattern is common with names, consists of the noun מִדוּן (quarrel, strife) and the common suffix “יָי X” (Arabic: yâʾ-an-nisba) to form an attribute or an adjective. However, to keep up with the metre the ה is vocalized as ‘He Interrogative’. Also the spelling of the words מִרְדְיוּ and מִרְדָּיו is different from their spelling in biblical Hebrew (מקיבר and מִרְדָּי). While the spelling צָלָלָה is more common in post-biblical Hebrew, מִרְדָּי is not found anywhere else.

Another mistake is the use of the plural צָלָלָה instead of the singular צָלָל. This is probably because the scribe, when replacing the Judaeo-Arabic word צָאַלְלָה with the Hebrew word צָלִיל, did not heed that the poet used the noun עַזָּי in the singular (and not in the dual/plural, like in the case of עַיְנֵי), in order to conform with the rhyme. Also the word בּוֹרָא is used instead of בּוֹרָאִים as a poetic licence to keep up with the metre.

A few figures of speech are used by the poet to emphasize his anger at his friend’s behaviour and his own innocence on the one hand, and his desire to make up with his beloved, kindled by a wave of nostalgia on the other. Thus, e.g. the words ‘enemy’, ‘poor’, ‘juice’, ‘suckle’ and ‘white’ are used as

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8 The word מִדוּן is also a place name see Jos. 11:1 and 12:19.

9 It is possible that the writer was influenced by the words פּוֹרְו א – פּוֹרָה (architectural structure) where both spellings occur in the Bible, see, 1Ch 26:18 and 2 Kings 23:11.
metaphors, while the expressions ‘the night until the morning’, ‘my eye died’ and ‘my ear tingled’ are used as hyperboles.

The expression “my eye died” may also be regarded as a synecdoche.

The contents

Since the first stanza appears here for the first time, but not, to the best of my knowledge, elsewhere, and certainly not in the version known to us, we do not know if it had been composed by Moshe Ibn Ezra himself or by someone else. One thing is however beyond doubt: our stanza fits the structure of the rest of the poem and its contents. The first stanza refers to a close friend of the poet who betrayed him, especially by casting a smear on him. Consequently, the poet regards him as his enemy and a quarrelsome person. Hence, the poet cannot bear this behaviour any more (נלאתי נשוא), and instead he can only feel helpless (ואני דל), as no one can explain (ואין משכיל) the desire of his former friend to fight (בכל חשקו המדוני). Similar ideas are to be found in the known version.

The second stanza describes the intimate relationship in the past between the poet and his enemy today. The poet stresses the physical contact between the two of them, using both denotative and connotative phrases to illustrate their sexual relationship that is ‘an unforgettable experience’.

The third stanza expresses the longing of the poet for his friend whose voice reverberates in his ears and his attempts to use unlawful magic, in order to bring his friend back to him. The הַרְגַּה repeats the idea of the tingling ear and stresses the poet’s wondering as to whether his friend remembers him. This is expressed by the idiomatic use of the verb in the passive (تراثי) meaning ‘I wonder’, which carries an element of uncertainty and hope.

The motive of love between males and homosexual relationship is not unknown in Mediaeval Hebrew poetry, which often deals with it in the context of love poetry. The issue is not unique to Hebrew poetry but may also be found in other cultures. Scholars who have researched the subject are not in agreement as to whether it is a real homosexual relationship or a figurative device used to stress the affections between people.¹⁰

The two versions

Schirmann’s version\(^\text{11}\), belongs to a collection of strophic love poems which contain three parts. The First and Second Parts consist of a two-line opening or beginning (maṭla’ = a refrain) and five stanzas, while the Third Part begins with a two-line opening followed by only three stanzas. Moreover, each part has a different metre (Part I: -- v--v-- Part II: v–v–v Part III: v--v--v--) and a different internal rhyme (Part I: AA BBBAA, CCCAA, DDDAA, EEEAA, FFFAA. Part II: AA GGGAA, HHHAA, IIIAA, JJJAA, AAAAA. The rhyme of Part III AA JJJAA has nothing to do with the rhyme of the first two Parts, since none of its stanzas rhymes in AA. Instead it rhymes as follows: LL MMMLL, NNNLL, OOOLL. However, as the Third Part differs from the first two Parts in its contents and its rhyme we may assume that it does not belong to the other Parts and is instead an independent love poem.

Our version has no two-line beginning but instead has three stanzas, where the second stanza is the third stanza, and the third stanza is the sixth stanza in the known version. Moreover, in Schirmann’s version each stanza (except the opening one) consists of five rhymed lines, while in our version each stanza has been “condensed” into four lines, thus changing the rhyme altogether, though if re-arranged according to the rhyming syllables, the poem would have looked as follows:

\[\text{נלחטי נשוא הכיל} \]
\[\text{לאור חלך 컡ל} \]
\[\text{אני לד איזנ طبيعي} \]
\[\text{כל השוק חגרות} \]
\[\text{וכל חשקנו חודים} \]
\[\text{לא אשכח ימי חולרי} \]
\[\text{ליל טבחו אל צרעי} \]
\[\text{על ת@implementation} \]
\[\text{מצ הרך ושאני} \]
\[\text{ועסס פי ניקני} \]
\[\text{יום ולכלת נע} \]
\[\text{הלקול עצלר אוצ} \]
\[\text{ותרויה בזרב צ線上} \]
\[\text{באליל תפלנ א المهني} \]
\[\text{ترامحבוכי ינקני} \]

\(^{11}\) See Schirmann 1954–56 I, 369–70.
It is clear that the metre in our version is not only different from the metre in Schirmann’s version but it is also completely inconsistent, thus, “ruining” even the internal rhyme.

Lexical differences between the two versions are also found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The known version</th>
<th>Our version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>עני (distress; poverty)</td>
<td>עני (my sin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>树木 อก Humanities หลัก ตรอง (I think well of him)</td>
<td>עליי אתה لن תריבי (why my ear tingles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>כים Newark יד וינש (maybe he will remember me again)</td>
<td>תר אمحובכ יتذكرני (I wonder /if/ my beloved /still/ remembers me)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

The existence of two versions of the poem raises a number of questions concerning the authorship and authenticity of the versions: Is the ‘new’ version more reliable than the one known to us hitherto? Is it an earlier or later version by Moshe Ibn Ezra himself? Is it a new version offered by an anonymous poet who believed his version to be more artistic? Is it an attempt to ‘reconstruct’ Ibn Ezra’s poem from memory by one of his fans? Is it a plagiarised version? Or is it an example of an “adoption”, i.e. the incorporation of parts of well-known poems into a fresh text, a stylistic phenomenon known in Arabic as taḍmīn? Another possibility is that the poem under discussion is incomplete and another piece containing the other stanzas, if survived, is ‘somewhere’ in the Genizah collections.

Since we have no information about the writer of the first stanza of our version who had also introduced a few changes in the grammar, lexicon and the structure of the whole poem, nor have we any details about the scribe, it seems that all these questions will remain unanswered.

Finally, although proof of plagiarism is not sufficient, one cannot ignore the surprising similarity between the first stanza of our version and the beginning of the other version of our poem composed by Yitzhak Ibn Abraham Ibn Ezra (whose exact dates of birth and death are unknown, but assumed to have taken place during the first half of the twelfth century), which begins with the line: סוד אהבים איכה יכיל / לב ודמע הולך רוכל and which also describes the poet’s disappointment with a young intimate friend who turned against him. The writer of the first stanza of our version was not

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13 See, Yitzhak Ibn Ezra, Širim 21. See also the editor’s comment on p. 62.
necessarily Yitzhak Ibn Ezra, but it is quite possible that our stanza was known to the latter.

REFERENCES


Bacon, Yitzhak. 1968. *Perakim be-hitpatḥut ha-miškal šel ha-šīra ha-ʿivrit [Stages in the Development of Metre in Hebrew Poetry]*. Tel-Aviv.


Appendix 1
Appendix 2

(а) Isaiah 1:14; (b) Following Jer. 6:11; (c) Jer. 9:3; (d) Following Jud. 6:15; (e) Following Ps. 14:2; (f) and 53:3; (g) Following 2 Ch. 8:6; (h) Following Jer. 15:10; (i) Jer. 6:25; (j) Following Jud. 6:15; (k) Following Ps. 36:12; (l) Following Ps. 39:6; (m) Following Gen. 19:33, 35; (n) Ezek. 4:4,5,8,9; (o) Appears in the Bible three times as זכר, whereas is probably based on זכרא in Aramaic; (p) Appears in the Bible twice as מרבדים (Pr. 7:16 and 31:22); (q) Appears in the Bible 16 times; (r) Following Cant. 1:19; (s) יִנְנִי appears in the Bible five times in the context of wine, e.g. Cant. 8:2. See also Rashi’s commentary on the word; (t) Following Ps. 69:4, 119:82, 123 and Lam. 2:11; (u) Following 1Sam. 3:11; (v) Following Gen. 30:27 and perhaps Lev. 19:26; (w) Following Hos. 9:7; (x) In Arabic: “my white” and perhaps following Isa. 1:18. It may also mean here ‘honor, reputation’ Arabic بياض الوجه used here as an oath like by my honour; (y) In colloquial Arabic, consisting of (علي + أي + شيء) – why. (z) Usually spelt in Arabic بياض
Appendix 3

The poem as appearing in Schirmann’s 1954–56 I, 369–70:

דָּוָא לָבָא וֶזֶּפֶם
גָּלֶג נָהֲלָא עָזִין

עָרִיב מַתָּשֵׁה כַּרָּפַךְ
עֶבָר לָבָא תֵּלָה שְׁבַךְ
עַמָּנֵנִי קַשָּׁה פָרָךְ
תַּעַקֶּשׁ חוֹצְבֵנוּ
נָהֲלָא לָבָא בְּאָבָנִי

עָפָר נָהֲלָא שְׁקִין
שֵׁמָלָה רָדָא קְלֵלָא פָּגי
קְבָּזוּת שְׁמָא שְׁקִין
אַהֲרָנִי גִּנְלִין
נָהֲלָא פָּחָא אָפִּלָא

לָא אַחִשֵּׁשׁוּ וָיְּ נָהֲלָא
לְיל שְׁבָבָא אֲלָא צָרָא
עַל תְּרָשִׁי יָדָבְרוּ
דָּוָא בְּרָשָׁנִי
נְעָפָרִים פְיָנָאִין

מִדָּה תְּקֻפֶּד לוֹבָא דָּרָא
מִדָּה חוֹתִיק בָּרָא הָנָא
אַהֲרָנִי שְׁרוּי נָכָבָא
כָּלָא בְּיָזַרָא
נָהֲלָא מָאֲהָא דָּרָא

יוֹ וָלָנָה לְבָא שְׁעֵי
יִנְּחוֹלָא שְׁלֵלָה שְׁוָעַה
נְגָשִׁיָּא בָּרָבֵיָא
כָּכְ הָאֲחָסְמִי לָבָא
טָשְׁרָא יָזֵרָא וּרְבֵי

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