

# A Poem Attributed to al-Ghazzālī in Hebrew Translation\*

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'*Omer ha-shikheḥah* [The Overlooked Sheaf] is a commentary on the Book of Proverbs written in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Algeria by various members of a Jewish family named Gavison/Gavishon.<sup>1</sup> The commentary has a final appendix containing a wide assortment of mostly literary materials, including the Hebrew translation (*al tivkhu aḥai*) of a long Arabic poem (*qul li-l-ikhwān*).<sup>2</sup> The translator of this text, Abraham Gavison (d. 1605),<sup>3</sup> explicitly attributes the source poem to the eleventh-century Iranian philosopher and mystic Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazzālī (d. 505 h./1111), whose authorship, however, has been disputed by some later commentators and modern bibliographers of al-Ghazzālī's works. Occasional references have been made to Gavison's translation since the mid-nineteenth century. It was edited in 1853 by Dukes, who included it

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1 Abraham and Jacob Gavison, '*Omer ha-shikheḥah*, Livorno 1748; reprint with introduction and notes by René S. Sirat, Jerusalem 1973, p. 138a. The only extant manuscript of this work, now held at the Rav Kook Foundation in Jerusalem, is an abridged copy of the edition..

2 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 135a-b.

3 Abraham Gavison's grandfather, also named Abraham, was a physician, first in the service of Euldj Ali, the *beylerbey* of Algiers, and later with the prince of Tlemcen. He brought a first version of '*Omer ha-shikheḥah* to completion in either 1565 or 1574. His father Jacob (d. after 1620) produced a version of his own in 1604. The translator of the poem under discussion added to his predecessors' work an assortment of materials, including poems of his own. For details on the family, see René-Samuel Sirat, "Omer ha-šikḥa et la famille Gabišon," *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 4:2 (1968), pp. 65-67; Hayyim Schirmann, "Gavison," Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., Detroit 2007, vol. 7, p. 397; and Marc Angel, "Gavison Family," Norman A. Stillman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World Online*, [http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ejiw\\_COM-0008360](http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=ejiw_COM-0008360), accessed 12 May, 2010.

in an appendix at the end of a short anthology of poems by the eleventh-century poet and philosopher Solomon Ibn Gabirol.<sup>4</sup> Other than that, the poem has gone almost unnoticed by literary historians and critics. This lack of interest is just one manifestation of the general indifference with which the commentary as a whole has been met, and is probably a result of the longstanding notion of translation as derivative and secondary vis-à-vis original texts. Against this backdrop of neglect, and taking as a methodological vantage point insights from the now well-established field of translation studies,<sup>5</sup> this article will bring the poem under focus, taking translation as a fundamental category of its analysis.<sup>6</sup> Following the precedents set by the Gavisons and by Dukes, and because Dukes' edition is difficult to find and my readings differ at times from his, I include the target poem in a final appendix.

## The Source and the Target Poems: A Survey of their Transmission

Since the early twentieth century there have been several editions of the original and much-celebrated Arabic poem *qul li-l-ikhwān*,<sup>7</sup> with significant differences in the text.<sup>8</sup> In 1931, the poem was edited and translated into French by Massignon.<sup>9</sup> That same year, Pedersen published his own critical edition, accompanied by a translation into German with commentary.<sup>10</sup> The controversy regarding authorship is well summarized in the Bouyges-Allard chronology of al-Ghazzālī's works. Briefly, while some classical commentators on the text, such as 'Abd al-Ghanī Ibn al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1739), supported al-Ghazzālī's authorship, others attributed it to his brother Aḥmad, or—as in the case of Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240)—to 'Alī Musaffar Sibṭī (d. 600/1203). Modern scholars have aligned themselves with one or the other of the two camps, or else not produced definitive arguments supporting attribution to any specific author.

4 Leopold Dukes, *Schire Schlomo: Hebräische Gedichte von Salomo ben Gabirol aus Malaga*, Hannover 1858, pp. 82-84.

5 The analysis I provide in the pages that follow has particularly benefited from Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, London 1992; Susan Bassnet and Harish Trivedi (eds.), *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, London 1999; and Peter Burke and R. Po-Chia Hsia (eds.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007.

6 In "From Al-Andalus to North Africa: The Intellectual Genealogy of a Jewish Family," Jonathan Ray (ed.), *The Jew in Medieval Iberia: 1100-1500*, Boston 2012, pp. 397-427, I analyze the Gavisons' strategies for fabricating a family and a scholarly genealogy for themselves. In the present paper I explore one of those strategies, namely translation, to its fullest.

7 Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, Leiden 1898-1902, no. 69.

8 See a list of editions in Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali (Algazel)*, Michel Allard (ed.), Beirut 1959, p. 145, n2.

9 Louis Massignon, "Le Dīwān d'al-Ḥallāj," *Journal asiatique* 25 (1931), pp. 1-158, at pp. 130-132.

10 Johannes Pedersen, "Ein Gedicht al-Gazālī's," *Le Monde oriental* 25 (1931), pp. 230-249.

The issue of authorship notwithstanding, it is known that the poem was read in Jewish circles from at least the thirteenth century onwards since a copy in Hebrew characters was found among the materials of the Cairo Geniza. This Geniza text was edited by Hirschfeld in 1929, together with the poem in Arabic characters and an English translation.<sup>11</sup> The text appears under the heading "So says the Imām, the philosopher, Abū Muḥammad," a figure Hirschfeld correctly identifies as Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī. It is therefore clear that in Jewish circles the poem was attributed from an early period to the renowned Muslim religious thinker. Other poems in Judeo-Arabic attributed to al-Ghazzālī are also known to exist and have been studied in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

Reference to the target poem, i.e. to Gavison's Hebrew translation, appears in Steinschneider's *magnum opus* on translations from Arabic into Hebrew, published in 1893.<sup>13</sup> The poem is available both in the 'Omer *ha-shikheḥah* edition and in Dukes' aforementioned anthology of Ibn Gabirol's poems. To the best of my knowledge, no translation into any other language has been made available to date. The poem is mentioned in passing in the few works written since the 1970s on 'Omer *ha-shikheḥah*<sup>14</sup> and in a few additional studies on translations of al-Ghazzālī's works.<sup>15</sup>

## A Brief Description of the Arabic and Hebrew Versions

Tradition has it that *qul li-l-ikhwān* was found next to al-Ghazzālī's dead body. In the poem, a thirty-two verse *qaṣīda* in *ramal* meter, the poetic persona addresses his intimates, urging them not to weep and mourn for him as he has been set free from his body and is now on high, in God's presence. He was a pearl in a shell, he says, a hidden treasure, a bird in a cage; he compares his past life to a dream. He was dead, the poetic persona asserts, and now he is alive.

In the appendix to 'Omer *ha-shikheḥah*, Abraham Gavison briefly introduces his translation by remarking that al-Ghazzālī wrote the poem in old age.<sup>16</sup> In it, he reports, al-Ghazzālī warns his brethren

11 Hartwig Hirschfeld, "A Hebraeo-Suffic Poem," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 49:2 (1929), pp. 168-173.

12 See for example Y. Tzvi Langermann, "A Judaeo-Arabic Poem Attributed to Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazali," *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos* [Hebrew section] 52 (2003), pp. 183-200.

13 Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebraeischen Uebersetzungen des Mittelalters*, Berlin 1893, pp. 347-348.

14 See Yosef Tobi, "Spanish Hebrew Poetry among Sephardic Jews in Sixteenth-Century Morocco" [in Hebrew], *Bikkoret u-Farshanut* 39 (2006), pp. 199-200.

15 See for example Langermann, note 12 above, p. 192.

16 Given the different versions of the source poem, the specific version used by Abraham Gavison for his translation cannot be determined with absolute certainty. What we do know with certainty is that the Geniza Judeo-Arabic text published by Hirschfeld circulated among Jews. This paper is written under the assumption that the translator used either this version or another closely resembling it.

not to mourn and lament for him as is or is not due, since for him the meaning of life in this world had been spiritual pleasure, to the extent that he had felt that he was in his body like a bird in a cage, and that by leaving it and fleeing his [soul] would find itself free—like a prisoner who, placed in iron chains, was suddenly set free, discarding the clothes of exile and captivity and replacing [his] filthy cloak with clean and pure garments.<sup>17</sup>

Gavison's translation of the source poem can therefore be said to begin in the introduction itself, where he equates the image of a bird in a cage—a most felicitous metaphor that was present in al-Ghazzālī's original and successfully allowed it to transcend time and place—with that of a prisoner who was once captive and has now been set free, and with one who has exchanged the soiled clothes of exile for pure, clean ones. Gavison's triple association of captivity-exile-impurity, which is heavily charged with powerful connotations in Judaism, is a creative elaboration of three allusions made to the body as a garment of the soul in the source poem (line 4: "this body was my house and my garment for a time"; and line 17: "they tore my garment to tatters, and scattered the whole of it, a buried fetish").<sup>18</sup>

### From Source to Target: Cultural Translation

In view of the above, it is clear that the source and the target texts share the same spirit. Both poems capture the moment at which the human soul is on the verge of leaving the body, and both use the exhortative tone of the poetic persona toward those who contemplate the corpse. In addition, both develop the creative potentialities of some common key images, such as that comparing soul and body to a bird in a cage, and both subscribe to the general tenets of Sufism.<sup>19</sup>

In spite of this general textual proximity, however, it is also clear that the target poem is by no means a word-for-word, nor even a line-by-line translation of the original. In his capacity as a translator, Gavison manipulates both the form and the content of the source poem. He makes a number of decisions which move the target poem away from its source: for instance, the lines are fewer, and, significantly, the alphabetic acrostic "Abraham Gavison" runs from verses 1 to 11. In all likelihood, the reduced number of lines is a by-product of the transfer

17 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 135a. The translation of this and all other quotations of *'Omer ha-shikhehah* below, is mine.

18 References are given to the text edited by Hirschfeld, note 11 above. The translation is his.

19 On Sufism and medieval Hebrew poetry, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul*, Philadelphia 1991, pp. 8-9.

of content across a cultural divide. Verses 12–14 in the original may serve to illustrate this point. The source text reads as follows: "My food and my drink are the same; this is a metaphor of mine; understand it well. / It is not limpid wine, or honey, no, nor water but milk. It was the drink of the Messenger of Allah when he travelled at night, and made [us] break his fast."<sup>20</sup> Reference is made here to a passage in the *Sīra* ["Life"] of the Prophet Muḥammad in which three vessels containing water, wine, and milk are placed in front of Muḥammad during his night journey; if he chooses the milk, Muḥammad declares (and the Angel Jibrīl confirms), the Islamic community will follow the true path.<sup>21</sup> No such allusion to the Messenger of God and his night journey is found in Gavison's translation. The only mention of food and drink in the target poem appears in verse 21, where Gavison tells his addressee(s) that "milk and honey" (Song of Songs 4:11) will be his/their food after death. No other trace of al-Ghazzālī's reference to milk exists.

Surely, all of Gavison's movements toward and away from al-Ghazzālī's poem are heavily charged with meaning, as are all the gains and losses that result from his intervention. Alterations of this sort are nonetheless far from surprising, as they are observed in other Hebrew translations of al-Ghazzālī's works and of Arabic texts more generally. It is well known, for instance, that translators met the challenge of rendering Qur'anic quotations in Hebrew in a variety of ways, including omission, substitution, and either literal or paraphrastic translation, as well as the provision of Qur'anic quotations in the original.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, the triple association of captivity-exile-impurity made in the introduction, the omission of all reference to the prophet Muḥammad's night journey, the general use of a language with biblical overtones and/or the use of explicit biblical quotations—all these help relocate the poem's content to a new cultural sphere, that of sixteenth-century Algerian Jewries.

As for the acrostic running from lines 1 to 11 in the target poem, by inscribing his name at the beginning of the first eleven verses, the translator betrays his intentions, claiming actual authorship for himself rather than linguistic and cultural mediation. Arguably, the acrostic turns the process of accommodation into one

20 As translated in Hirschfeld, note 11 above, p. 172.

21 *Das Leben Muhammeds nach Muhammed Ibn Ishak*, Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (ed.), Göttingen 1858, vol. 1, pp. 263-271, as quoted in Michael A. Sells (ed. and trans.), *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Quran, Poetic and Theological Writings*, New York 1996, p. 54.

22 This phenomenon is studied in Jonathan Decker, "The Rendering of Qur'anic Quotations in Hebrew Translations of Islamic Texts," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96:3 (2006), pp. 336-358.

of appropriation.<sup>23</sup> Its existence thus confirms that the idea of transforming the target poem into an original text was certainly present in the translator's mind.

Moreover, looking at the co-text to which the poem belongs<sup>24</sup> it becomes apparent that Gavison not only translated the text from Arabic to Hebrew, with the manipulations that the process of translation consciously and unconsciously entailed, but was also concerned to 'translate' al-Ghazzālī himself for a Jewish readership. To that end, he credited al-Ghazzālī with authorship of a list of books — the *Kawwanot*,<sup>25</sup> *Mozne ha-'iyyunim*,<sup>26</sup> *Sefer 'Agullot ra'yoniyot*,<sup>27</sup> *Sefer happalat ha-filosofim*,<sup>28</sup> *Sefer happalat ha-happalah*<sup>29</sup> — some authentic, some spurious. Moreover, he highlighted the impact of al-Ghazzālī's ideas on celebrated classical Jewish authors such as Isaac Arama [*Ba'al ha-'aqedah*] (d. 1494), Jedaiah ha-Penini

23 The use of acrostics to refer to a work's author did not escape the attention of Isaac Arama (d. 1494), who at the end of his commentary on the *eshet hayil* in Proverbs lamented that medieval Jewish poets had turned this biblical practice into a device of self-praise. Arama saw the use of personal acrostics in liturgical poems as particularly deplorable and claimed to have erased from his books those examples he had come across. See Isaac Arama, *Sefer Mishle 'im perush Yad Avshalom* [The Book of Proverbs with the Yad Absalom Commentary], I. Freimann (ed.), Leipzig 1858-59, reprinted Jerusalem 1968, p. 108.

24 See Gavison, note 1 above, 135a.

25 *Maqāsid al-falāsifa* [The Intentions of the Philosophers] was translated into Hebrew three times during the thirteenth century. It was first translated by Isaac Albalag (1292) as *Sefer tikkun ha-de'ot* (or *De'ot ha-filosofim*), which contained two parts of the original, namely those on logic and metaphysics. Isaac Pułgar completed the translation of the third part in 1307. Judah b. Solomon Nathan translated the work twice between 1330 and 1340 under the title *Kawwanot ha-filosofim*. Finally, the work was translated anonymously in the first half of the fourteenth century. Moses Narboni's commentary on this last translation became a very popular treatise in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Over fifty manuscripts of the Hebrew translations are extant, along with a wide variety of commentaries.

26 *Mozne ha-'iyyunim* [Balance of the Inquiries] has been attributed to al-Ghazzālī and to Ibn Rushd. The Arabic original of this Hebrew translation has not been identified. A few manuscripts name Jacob b. Makhir (d. 1308), grandson of Samuel ibn Tibbon, as the translator. A passage of *Mozne ha-'iyyunim* is quoted in *Keshet u-magen* [Bow and Shield] by Simon b. Şemaḥ Duran (d. 1444). See Langermann, note 12 above, pp. 190-191.

27 *'Agullot ha-ra'yoniyot* [Intellectual Circles] is Moses ibn Tibbon's translation of *Kitāb al-ḥaḍā'iq* [Book of the Circles] by the Andalusī philosopher Ibn Sīd al-Baṭalyawṣī (d. 521/1127). Two other Hebrew translations of this book are known. Abraham Gavison attributes *Kitāb al-ḥaḍā'iq* to al-Ghazzālī.

28 Al-Ghazzālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* was translated by Zerāhiah ha-Levi in 1411 under the title *Happalat ha-filosofim*. In the fourteenth century, Isaac ben Nathan of Cordova translated a small treatise by al-Ghazzālī offering answers to philosophical questions under the Hebrew title *Ma'amar bi-teshuvot she'elot nish'al me-hem* (published by H. Malter, Frankfurt-am-Main 1897).

29 In some Hebrew manuscripts the *Tahāfut* is followed by a small treatise in which al-Ghazzālī answers the objections which he himself had raised. Abraham Gavison may be referring to this treatise when he reports a story according to which al-Ghazzālī was summoned by the king and asked to write a book against philosophy. Forced to write the book against his will during the day, the philosopher devoted his nights to preparing a refutation of it.

(d. 1340), author of the prose poem *Behinat 'olam* [Examination of the World], Moses Ḥabib (d. c. 1520), who wrote a commentary on ha-Penini's work, and finally the author of *Sefer ha-emunot*.<sup>30</sup> By means of this introductory passage, where works attributed to al-Ghazzālī are systematically cited by the title of their Hebrew translation, Gavison places al-Ghazzālī within a Jewish context, first by enumerating the texts attributed to him by Jewish sources and then by pointing out the existence of a tradition of reliance on al-Ghazzālī's works among recognized Jewish authorities. Overall, one might argue, this introduction is intended to 'translate' al-Ghazzālī himself from an Arabic to a Hebrew cultural context.

Moreover, given his intended readership, it was not only linguistic and cultural but also religious otherness that Gavison needed to translate. It is no accident, then, that we find the following words at the end of his translation: "Though [al-Ghazzālī] was not Jewish [*mi-bene Israel*], it is common knowledge that Gentile sages will have a part in the world to come; so much so when it is a man like this, whose merit and faith will surely not keep him away from the heavens."<sup>31</sup> These lines, consistent with the well-known practice in Jewish sources of following al-Ghazzālī's name with the formula for deceased pious Muslims,<sup>32</sup> are clearly intended to 'translate', so to speak, the religious other.

In close connection with the target poem, Gavison includes two additional poems on the soul. One of these is a 141-verse poem beginning with the line *nafshi le-matai tiskeli* by Abraham b. Me'ir b. Abi Zimra, a contemporary of the translator's grandfather and among the most notable Jewish poets of sixteenth-century Algeria.<sup>33</sup> The other is the celebrated poem *mah lakh yehidah teshvi*<sup>34</sup> by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, whom the Gavisons mention several times throughout their commentary. By affiliating his translation of al-Ghazzālī's poem with the work of a renowned Algerian poet close to his own family and with that of a widely acknowledged poet from al-Andalus influenced by al-Ghazzālī himself, the translator achieves a double effect. First, this strategy helps situate the Arabo-Islamic source within a Hebrew-Jewish target milieu. Second, it places Abraham Gavison himself at the end of a continuum of classic writers which runs from eleventh-century al-Andalus to sixteenth-century Algeria.

30 The reference is presumably to *Sefer emunah ramah* [The Book of Exalted Faith] by the twelfth-century Sephardic author Abraham ibn Daud, whose acquaintance with al-Ghazzālī's work is well known.

31 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 135b.

32 Hirschfeld, note 11 above, p. 168.

33 See Tobi, note 14 above, p. 194.

34 For an edition of the poem, see *Solomon Ibn Gabirol: Secular Poems* [in Hebrew], 2nd ed., Dov Jarden (ed.), Jerusalem 1984, vol. 1, pp. 233-235.

## The Translation Program

Turning our view from Abraham Gavison's translation of *qul li-l-ikhwān* and comments on al-Ghazzālī to the larger framework within which these texts are inscribed—the appendix as a whole, and the entire *'Omer ha-shikheḥah*—it becomes immediately apparent that the poem represents just one example among many of a certain translation strategy. The poem is in fact one part of a program of translation carried out by the Gavisons throughout the commentary, most significantly in the appendix.

The translation of Arabic poems into Hebrew is announced early in *'Omer ha-shikheḥah*, in one of the book's rather programmatic prologues written by Solomon ben Ṣemaḥ Duran,<sup>35</sup> in which the volume is described as a sort of anthology compiling previously written commentaries on the Book of Proverbs as well as an assortment of Arabic poems, "to be found sweet by those who understand them, and whose translation [into Hebrew] will reveal to those who do not know [Arabic] that they were in fact taken from the biblical book of Proverbs."<sup>36</sup> Like Abraham Gavison in his translation of al-Ghazzālī's poem, Duran translates an entire body of foreign literature into terms acceptable to his target readership. The claim that Arabic poems and proverbs had their source in the Bible was a common strategy among Jewish authors from antiquity well into the Renaissance and was used as a means of transferring material across linguistic and cultural divides.<sup>37</sup>

There are two ways, however, in which the translation of al-Ghazzālī's poem differs from countless similar works scattered throughout the Gavisons' book. Most other such works are short poems—typically two to four verses—provided both in the original and in translation. The translation of *al tivkhu aḥai* is considerably

35 Solomon b. Ṣemaḥ (d. after 1593), a member of the Duran family whose ancestors came to Algeria from the Balearic Islands in the fourteenth century, authored, among other books, a commentary on Proverbs titled *Hesheq Shelomoh*, published in Venice in 1623. He wrote his prologue to *'Omer ha-shikheḥah* after the first edition of the book had been completed; see note 3 above.

36 Prologue by Solomon b. Ṣemaḥ Duran (pages not numbered). The "sweetness" of the original was a widespread notion in translation theory and practice. By way of example, Dante's words in *Il Convivio* [The Banquet] can be cited: "And therefore let each one know that nothing which is harmonized by the bond of the Muse can be translated from its own language into another without breaking all its sweetness and harmony" (Dante Alighieri, *The Banquet*, Middlesex 2007, Book 1, Chapter 7, p. 16). Closer to home, and in reference to Biblical poetry, the fifteenth-century Castilian poet Íñigo López de Mendoza, Marquis of Santillana, complained that "the Jews dare to assert that we [Christians] cannot feel the taste of its sweetness as they do" (Ángel Gómez Moreno [ed.], *El prohemio e carta del Marqués de Santillana y la teoría literaria del siglo XV*, Barcelona 1990, p. 53; the English translation is mine).

37 For similar arguments among Andalusī Jewish authors, see Esperanza Alfonso, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes: Al-Andalus from the Tenth to Twelfth Century*, London 2007, p. 44.

longer and is provided in translation only. The translator's decision not to include the original in this particular case may well have been motivated by the length of the poem, and, most likely, by the religious untranslatability of some of its lines. This is most strikingly illustrated by the aforementioned exclusion of the two verses referring to Muḥammad's night journey, an omission opening a significant gap between source and target.

Edited bilingual versions of short poems and proverbs, sometimes clustered in mini-anthologies, are thus the norm throughout the book. Providing source and target texts side by side seems to serve well the twofold goal identified by Duran in his introduction. In some cases, a source poem is translated more than once. The following two lines, in Arabic, are the source text in one such instance:

אל עלם חיאה ללקלוב כמה / תחיית אל בלאד אדה מסהא למטר  
אל עלם יגלוא אל עמא מן קלב נצח אבה כמה / יגלוא סואד אל טלאם אל קמר

Abraham Gavison translates these lines into Hebrew as follows:

והחכמה ללב אישים תחיה / כמו מטר לאביב ולאפל  
ומלב כל חביריה לערוון / הלא תאיר כירח באופל<sup>38</sup>

He then provides an additional translation by his father:

מטר שחק יחיה הזרעים / בעת ירר ואם ירבה ימיתם  
<sup>39</sup>והחכמה תחיה לב בעלים / ואם תרבה לחיי עד תשיתם

Arguably, the practice of providing alternative translations of short poems such as this is intended to reveal the translator's technical virtuosity and skills, his mastery of both the source and the target languages, and his feeling at ease in both the source and the target cultures.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, these alternative translations help discredit the longstanding view of a static binary relationship between target and source. From the Gavisons' perspective, both original and translation are seen as equally unstable and open to a creative dynamic relationship.

Since the bilingual editing of poetry and proverbs is ingrained in the very nature of the Gavisons' commentary, and since the cultural model they advocate is a bilingual one, it is hardly surprising that they present Jewish authors who wrote

38 Meter: *Ha-merubbeh*.

39 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 130c. Meter: *Ha-merubbeh*.

40 For a comparable example with three alternative translations, see Gavison, note 1 above, p. 125b.

in Arabic and whose work was later translated into Hebrew as cultural authorities and role models. This is borne out by the following passage by Jacob Gavison, also included in the appendix to the book:

Who for us is higher than Maimonides?—Jacob wondered—Well, it so happens that Maimonides explained the *mishnayyot* in Arabic [in a book] titled *al-Sirāj*, i.e. *ha-Ner* [The Lamp],<sup>41</sup> until the rabbis, namely Rabbi al-Ḥarizi and Shemu'el Ibn Tibbon, came along and translated it into our holy language. [He] also wrote the *Guide for the Perplexed* in Arabic, titling it *Dalālat al-hā'irīn*, until the aforementioned rabbis translated it, as is generally acknowledged. And it so happens that some of these rabbis were not proficient in both languages and so truncated and added to [the book's] intended meaning, to the point of sparking off the infamous controversy about [Maimonides'] books between Jewish communities, while the later sages succeeding them delved into the very depths of [the work's] meaning and attributed the shortcomings to the translator, as the Gaon Rabbi Meshullam has noted in a long poem....<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the pious Rabbi Baḥya Ibn Paqudah wrote *The Book of the Duties of the Heart* in Arabic and Rabbi Judah Ibn Tibbon translated it into our sacred language, the title being *Farā'id al-qulūb* in Arabic and *Sefer ḥovot ha-levavot* in Hebrew... Likewise, Rabbi Moses Ibn Ezra wrote a book full of treasures in Arabic under the title *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa-l-mudhākara*, meaning *Moshav ha-khoḥmah we-zikhronah* [Book of Discussion and Remembrance]... The wise Abraham Bedersi, father of Rabbi Yedayah ha-Penini, author of *Behinat 'olam* [Contemplation of the World], was a renowned poet of pious repute and the contemporary of Rabbi Ṭodros Halevi, author of *'Oṣar ha-kavod* [Treasury of Glory]; and [it is known that] they exchanged sweet and delicious poems written in the holy spirit, that is, in the holy language, [and that] they translated Arabic poems. Rabbi Bedersi wrote [to Rabbi Ṭodros Halevi] as follows:

You have defeated us with sweet poems,  
translated from those in Arabic.

We shall therefore abandon our instruments and remain silent,  
and on the poplars hang up our lyres.<sup>43</sup>

41 This refers to the *Commentary on the Mishnah*.

42 The reference is to Meshullam ben Solomon de Piera (d. 1260). On this poem, see Hayyim Schirmann, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain and Provence* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem and Tel Aviv 1954-60, vol. 2, pp. 295-318.

43 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 119b.

In this passage Jacob Gavison hints at the cultural problems arising from poor translation. By quoting both the original and the translated titles, Jacob Gavison establishes a cultural framework in the midst of which he places his family's work, characterized as it was by the simultaneous mastery of Arabic and Hebrew. In this and similar passages, he and his relatives devise the tradition of a culture in translation in which they inscribe 'Omer ha-shikheḥah. By the same token, they develop a self-consciousness as mediators and translators, one that not only emerges as part of the rhetoric expected in the prologue to a translated work,<sup>44</sup> but is rather ingrained in their entire book, in such a way that the processes of translation and original authorship not only coexist but are intentionally conflated.

This active blurring of the borders between origin and translation comes openly to the fore in other passages where the Gavisons assert that some texts in the Hebrew Bible, including sections of Proverbs, were translated from foreign languages into Hebrew. Commenting on Proverbs 26:28, Jacob Gavison provides an example from the Book of Job:

The works of the Sages arguing that Moses had translated the Book of Job from a [foreign] language to our holy tongue are well known. In my view, the source language from which it was translated was the language of Paras [Persia], that is togarmah,<sup>45</sup> as in this language the subject comes before the attribute and the object precedes the verb, and the Book of Job is mostly written in such a manner.<sup>46</sup>

Likewise, commenting on the term *he'etiqu* (translated or copied<sup>47</sup>) in Proverbs

44 Eleazar Gutwirth, "Entendudos: Translation and Representation in the Castile of Alfonso the Learned," *The Modern Language Review* 93:2 [1998], pp. 384-399, esp. pp. 389-390, analyzes the Alfonsine Jewish translators' construction of an assertive persona in the prologues to their translations.

45 *Togarmah* makes reference to Turkey. Comparison with Turkish only makes sense if we remember that Algeria became an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire in 1544. Alternatively, it could also be a corruption of Targum, meaning Aramaic.

46 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 95c. For the traditional attribution of the Book of Job to Moses, see Talmud Bavli, *Bava Batra*, 14b. From the time of Abraham Ibn Ezra it was also held that Job had been translated from another language, perhaps Arabic or Aramaic. See Mariano Gómez Aranda (ed.), *El comentario de Abraham ibn Ezra al Libro de Job: Edición crítica, traducción y estudio introductorio*, Madrid 2004, p. 10\*.

47 Differences in interpretation are due to the uncertain meaning of the root '-t-q, which is here interpreted as "translating" (from one language to another), as opposed to "transcribing" or "collecting," as other sources would have it. For the second interpretation, see for example the words of the fifteenth-century Castilian exegete Moses Arragel: "E es la razón que todos los ensienplos fasta aquí dichos eran dichos de Salamon, letra por letra; pero estos que de aquí adelante fueron escriptos, trasladados de otros libros que fizo Salamon e tomados e cogidos dellos por ellos; por ende dixo que los trasladaron e coligieron de sus mismos libros de Salamon, e por ende dixo que trasladaron que,

25:1 ("These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah translated/copied"), the author remarks:

This *ha'ataqa* (translation/copy) may refer to an oral account which [the men of King Hezekiah] had translated from a foreign tongue into our sacred language, as Solomon was in agreement with some Gentile sages and kings, such as Pythagoras the Egyptian, in whose books the forefathers claimed they had read that, having lived in the times of King Solomon, he had gone to meet him, and had seen [at Solomon's court] the Levites singing, and had taken from them the science of music and had seen marvellous things. All this is mentioned in question number eighty-three of *Derekh ha-sekhel* [The Way of Wisdom], a book written by Abraham Gavison the Elder, may his memory be blessed, on the Queen of Sheba and on Solomon's answers to her riddles, as it is said that Solomon used to speak with her in her language and not in Hebrew. Such was also the case with Lemuel and Agur ben Yaqeh and Iti'el, as this is the only time their names are mentioned among the sages of Solomon and among his dignitaries, either in the Book of Kings or in Chronicles.<sup>48</sup> According to the plain meaning of the text, these were pagan sages who came to Solomon to listen to him and learn from his wisdom. Solomon needed to speak to them in a language they could understand. This is why these verses [in Proverbs] are more profound than the previous ones, which had not been translated [from a foreign language] [...]. According to the exegetes, however, this would not have been an oral account translated from one language into another, as the term *ha'ataqah* would then mean *ketivah* [writing]. They [i.e., the men of Hezekiah] must have compiled these Proverbs together, as there was only one author.<sup>49</sup>

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otra mente, pues que la lengua toda era vna e avn a sazón non era cambiada la lengua ebrayca por ninguna otra lengua, non auia por que decir trasladaron." ("All the above proverbs were Solomon's sayings, word for word, but the proverbs that follow, drawn from other books written by Solomon, had been taken and collected by [the men of King Hezekiah] from these books. This is why [the Scripture] says they compiled [these proverbs] from the books of Solomon. And this is the only reason it says 'trasladaron', as the Hebrew language was one and had not been replaced by any other language.") *Biblia: Antiguo Testamento, traducida del hebreo al castellano por Rabi Mose Arragel, publicada por el Duque de Berwick y de Alba*, n.p. 1929, p. 793.

48 Rabbinic sources (Talmud Bavli, *Avot*, Chapter 5) maintain that Solomon was given six names: Jedidiah, Qohelet, Agur, Yaqeh, Iti'el, and Lemuel. The Gavisons draw from an alternative tradition, which dates back at least as far as Sa'adia Gaon, according to which Agur and Lemuel are the names of other authors whose sayings were appended to the Book of Proverbs.

49 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 88b. The idea that the Saying of Agur had been translated from another language into Hebrew was known but not generally accepted.

Commenting on Proverbs 30:1, he further argues:

It follows that all these [proverbs], too, were translated by the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, for had they not been so translated, they would have been included along with those proverbs which are not translations. Had these words been interpreted according to the plain meaning of the text, these names would have been mentioned neither in the Book of Kings nor in Chronicles. It is likely, then, that these were *ḥakhame ha-ummot* ("Gentile sages") who came to study under [Solomon]. And these proverbs must also have been translated by the men of Hezekiah from a foreign language into our own.<sup>50</sup>

In view of the above, it becomes clear that Abraham Gavison's translation of al-Ghazzālī's poem is part of a larger translation program where source and target texts often coexist and where the Gavisons make a constant and conscious effort to place originals and translations on the same level, thereby destabilizing the assumed binary relationship between the two. If translation is not seen as derivative and secondary but as an influential cultural practice, the decision to retain an original text is neither arbitrary nor accidental but highly meaningful, and one inevitably wonders about the Gavisons' intentions in recording both originals and translations. As has already been noted, their decision is consistent with the twofold purpose identified by Duran in the prologue: the sweetness of the Arabic is meant to be enjoyed by Arabic speakers, and the Hebrew translation is meant to prove, apologetically, that the source Arabic poems draw, in turn, on the Biblical book of Proverbs. This, however, can only be part of the explanation. Cultural practices, one ought not to forget, are always social in their signification, and it seems likely that Duran's comments are in fact pointing to an otherwise unidentified double readership of Arabic and non-Arabic Jewish speakers. Shifting the focus even further from *'Omer ha-shikheḥah* and onto the conditions in which the book was produced and consumed will help to identify this readership and explain more fully how a bilingual-edition program fitted into the Gavisons' overall project.

Families like the Gavisons, whose origins (as they repeatedly remind their readers throughout the book) lay in Islamic Granada, formed a minority in sixteenth-century Algeria, since most of the 1492 exiles had come from the Christian Iberian kingdoms. That these deportees took with them their written and oral heritage and that Judeo-Spanish became a unifying force and a source of identity of the Sephardic diaspora in Islamic lands are well established facts which do

<sup>50</sup> Gavison, note 1 above, p. 109b.

not need further discussion here.

While the presence of Judeo-Spanish in Morocco, at the center of the Ottoman Empire, and in the Levant is better documented than in Algeria, nothing indicates that the status of Judeo-Spanish in the large Algerian Jewish communities was any different.<sup>51</sup> The numbers of Spanish captives steadily brought to Algeria and the local Jews' commercial ties with Italian cities could only have favored the survival of Judeo-Spanish among Algerian Jews. Sermons were in all likelihood delivered in Judeo-Spanish, and the language probably had a significant impact in education.<sup>52</sup> As in other centers of the Sephardic diaspora,<sup>53</sup> Jews originating from the Iberian Peninsula, particularly from Castile, plausibly regarded themselves, and were regarded by others, as an intellectual elite.

It is probably to this group—Jews from Castile who continued to speak Spanish and would have felt uneasy about the profuse inclusion of Arabic poems in a Hebrew biblical commentary—that Duran refers when identifying the commentary's double intended readership. By intentionally preserving the original Arabic, by putting forward a bilingual Arabic/Hebrew classical canon, by portraying themselves as part of that canon, and by proving their capacities as skilled translators, the Gavisons staked a claim for themselves as an alternative literary and intellectual elite in opposition to that of the Castilian rabbis. Far from considering translation a subordinate cultural by-product, they placed it at the very center of their literary and scholarly program.

The translation program offered by the Gavisons in *'Omer ha-shikheḥah* and outlined in these pages is a privileged window into translation as a central practice in Jewish cultural history, and yet it is only a piece in the complex puzzle of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jewish translation in North Africa, a field of study that remains to be mapped.

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51 In Chapter 29 of his *Topografía e historia general de Argel* (1612), when listing the languages spoken in Algiers, Diego de Haedo mentions Sephardic Jews as "speaking Spanish, Italian and French beautifully" (Diego de Haedo, *Topografía e historia general de Argel*, Madrid 1927, p. 116). For the continued use of Spanish in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, see for example Yaron ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, Tübingen 2008, pp. 423-424.

52 The Gavisons' reference to *rabbotenu ha-lo'azim* probably refers to Jewish scholars from Christian lands. See Gavison, note 1 above, p. 119c.

53 See Joseph Hacker, "The Intellectual Activity of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (eds.), *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge 1987, pp. 95-135.

## Appendix

- אל תבכו אחי ואל תנודו / אלי ואל נא בנהי תספודו  
 בכו ככו הולך, אכל איש תם אני / עלי בלי תהמו ולא תחרדו  
 רוע לבוש כתנתי פשטתי / וגנות פעלי חלפו אבדו  
 היו עוני לי לראש קדם אבול / עתה לפני כרעו סגדו  
 מראש לצפור בכלוב רוחי ונפ- / שי נדמו עד יבשו צפדו  
 גם לא ראיתי נוח עדי שבו למ- / קור נבראו מנהו ובו נוסדו  
 בדרך ישרים פרעה עת שמעה / קדש וגם חול יחדו נצמדו  
 יחד יפארו אל בעת כי הכדיל / בין דר ובין דרדר וגם נפרדו  
 שת לי אלהים בין חסידיו מהלכים / ולנגדי קמו וגם עמדו  
 ואחיה מאחרי מותי, ומל- / אכי אלהים לי פאר ענדו  
 נועם ה' אחזה גם אקראה / חקיו, אשר מפל יקר נכבדו  
 מי זה חכם לכב ימלא את רצון / קונו וחפצו מתניו יאבדו  
 עז וחלציו כאמונה יאזור / יתענגה מזיו שמו וכבודו  
 חושו ומהרו נא ידידיו זאת עשו / לכם עלי דלתי תעודה שקדו  
 מצות והתורות וחקים שמרו / עד ירבו ישתרגו ישקדו  
 שלום בבואך יאמרו ניני אל- / הים אז למולך ישמחו וירקדו  
 מטות זהבים וכספים יעשו / לך מלאכי מרום ולך יעבודו  
 גזר וציץ הם יעטו לך ובסוד / עליון וזבד טוב לך יזבדו  
 וכפי אשר תשיג בעולמך יהי / חלק כחלק כענק לך ירבודו  
 תזרח ותופיע ותאיר במאור / שבעת ימי עולם אשר נוסדו  
 ודבש וחלב יהיו לך מאכל / נפשו כחכמי לב אשר שרדו  
 המחלצות המטונפות וה- / צואים, הלא הם נפשטו נמעדו  
 לכן לבוש מלובשו ועת יפשטו / אל תבכו אחי ואל תנודו<sup>54</sup>

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54 Gavison, note 1 above, p. 135a-b. Meter: *ha-shalem*, with metrical irregularities in lines 6, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 23. The meaning and vocalization of line 6 is uncertain.