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# Reorienting Hebrew Literary History: The View from the East

LITAL LEVY

## ABSTRACT

*Although Hebrew literary criticism has begun redressing the exclusion of women and minority writers from the Hebrew canon, the literary geography of modern Hebrew remains largely unquestioned. Modern Hebrew literature is still viewed as the progeny of European maskilim, while the concurrent production of belles lettres in Hebrew and other languages by non-Ashkenazi Jewries has been overlooked. What are the ramifications of this Eurocentric viewpoint for our understanding of the origins of Jewish cultural modernity, of modern Hebrew literature, and of contemporary Israeli literature produced by Mizrahi and Sephardi writers?*

*In this essay, I call for a new approach to the study of Hebrew literature and its history on two fronts. First, I advocate exploring the relationships between Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Arab Jews in the multilingual corpus of Jewish literature produced from the nineteenth century onward. Second, I propose investigating the full range of cultural influences that resonate in Mizrahi literature produced in Israel. This essay focuses primarily upon the first of these two questions: the revision of Hebrew literary historiography. I begin by reviewing the state of Hebrew literary historiography in relation to Mizrahi writing. I then suggest commencing my proposed historical revision with a multilingual, “global” model of Haskalah that emphasizes reciprocal channels of cultural circulation and transmission between and among Europe, Africa, and Asia. By way of example, I sketch the contours of modern Arab Jewish textual production beginning in the nineteenth century. The last part of the essay considers examples of Hebrew-Arabic interculturality in the context of Iraqi Jewry during two different historic moments. After closely analyzing a 1920 Hebrew poem from Baghdad, I conclude with a preliminary investigation of the myriad cultural influences shaping the work of the two leading Israeli writers from Iraq, Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas.*

Set mainly in early twentieth-century Baghdad, Sami Michael's novel *Viktorya* depicts the Rafael character as a new and avid reader:

And another passion gripped him. His mastery of Arabic, which he had acquired by his own efforts, increased by leaps and bounds, and he became a voracious reader of the world literature which was then being translated in Cairo. . . . To his astonishment, Rafael discovered that the spiritual giants of every age were, like him, preoccupied by thoughts of death and sex. . . .

And there was something else which the books gave him. He regarded himself as bold and intelligent. . . . It seemed to him that he knew everything and was capable of anything. And now these giants of the spirit came and taught him a lesson in humility. They spread a vast world of profundity and imagination and wisdom out before him, and he stood amazed and awed like a dweller on the plains looking for the first time upon the sublime glory of the mountain peaks.<sup>1</sup>

As a consumer of modern literature printed in Arabic, Rafael represents a larger trend among Jews in the Arab world. In the twentieth century, the Arabic-language newspaper and book became important elements of urban modernity in places like Baghdad and Cairo. Being an intellectual, even if one wrote in English or French, meant having cultural fluency in Arabic. When Jewish writers from the Arab world migrated to Israel, however, they found their Arabic-based cultural formation largely meaningless in the new Israeli context. This predicament is related by the Iraqi-born writer Shimon Ballas in the documentary film *Forget Baghdad*,<sup>2</sup> when Ballas recalls the first article he ever wrote for an Israeli publication: an Arabic-language piece commemorating the famous nineteenth-century Islamic intellectual Jamal al-Din al-Afghani.<sup>3</sup> Laughing, Ballas remembers his Israeli readers' amazement upon discovering al-Afghani, who is a universally recognized figure among educated Arabs.<sup>4</sup> Translated into the nearest Hebrew cultural equivalent, it would be as though his audience had never heard of Ahad Ha-Am.

What are the ramifications of this cultural gap for Hebrew literary studies? If the geography of modern Hebrew literature skips directly from Central and Eastern

Europe to Tel Aviv, where in this map might we locate Baghdad—by which I mean not only the place, but the cultural world, a world shaped by the Arabic books consumed by Rafael, by the intellectual legacy of figures such as al-Afghani? For most scholars of modern Hebrew literature, the cultural developments of the twentieth-century Middle East are uncharted ground. But both Mikhael and Ballas began their literary activities in Arabic while still living in Iraq, and continued publishing in Arabic for a decade or so after their immigration to Israel (largely through the aegis of local communist publications such as *al-Jadid* and *al-Ittihad*).<sup>5</sup> As writers, they are first and foremost products of the literary and cultural environment of their native Baghdad. Even the writing of Eli 'Amir, who came to Israel at a younger age and began his career in Hebrew, demonstrates a preoccupation with the cultural environment of his formative years.<sup>6</sup> Upon emigration to Israel, these writers, who brought with them the cultural “baggage” of modern Arab culture, encountered the trajectory of twentieth-century Hebrew literature.<sup>7</sup> Their Hebrew writings, then, would be more accurately situated at the crossroads of at least two cultural and historic contexts: 1940s Baghdad and post-1950 Israel.

As for Mizraḥim born in Israel (as well as those who arrived at a young age), both their linguistic background as native speakers of Hebrew and their education in Israeli schools bring them considerably closer to the European-Ashkenazi trajectory of Hebrew literature. Nevertheless, on the whole their works reflect a significantly different cultural and historical experience and different viewpoints than those articulated by Ashkenazi writers. Although these Israeli-born authors do not read Arabic and are thus not directly influenced by Arabic literature, the myriad cultural influences informing their work have not yet been accounted for by Hebrew literary historiography and criticism.<sup>8</sup> To quote Hans Jauss, “[P]rehistories are always discovered *ex eventu* as *prehistory* of a *post-history*.”<sup>9</sup> In the Mizraḥi context, which emerged from a moment of rupture with the past, the prehistory awaiting (re)discovery is the modern intellectual and literary history of Jews from Asia and Africa during the century preceding their emigration to Israel (and subsequent reinvention as “Mizraḥim”).<sup>10</sup> This overlooked history is perhaps relevant to the study of contemporary Mizraḥi writing in Israel not in the traditional sense of literary influence, but as one source for the different cultural worlds and historical pasts (real, imagined or reimagined) that are tapped by many Mizraḥi authors.<sup>11</sup>

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In this essay, I call for a new approach to the study of Hebrew literature and its history on two related fronts. First, I advocate redressing the Eurocentrism of Hebrew literary historiography, with an eye to exploring the relationships between Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Arab Jews in Jewish literature produced from the nineteenth century onward. Second, I propose investigating the full range of cultural influences that resonate in Mizraḥi literature produced in Israel. In this limited venue, my own initial efforts at addressing these lacunae will focus primarily on the question of Hebrew literary historiography. Although my arguments pertain to Ladino-speaking Jewry as well as to speakers of Persian and Central Asian Jewish dialects, my own research focuses on intersections of Hebrew and Arabic, and hence my examples are drawn from the corpus of writing by Arab Jews.

Now for a few clarifications. I am not suggesting a history in the sense of a “separate but equal” narrative of continuous evolution that would simply parallel the existing narrative of Hebrew literature. Rather, I call for a more comprehensive history of Jewish writing that integrates non-European writers and seeks connections across regional, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Nor do I call for a nostalgic search for Mizraḥi “origins,” or imply that the literary developments discussed below constitute historic stepping stones whose significance culminates in a telos, that of contemporary Mizraḥi literature in Israel.<sup>12</sup> I also do not structure my argument in “comparative” (competitive) terms, focusing on questions of quantity or quality. Relative to the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe, Jewish writers in southeastern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and India did not play a major role in the development of modern Hebrew literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the issue of comparison becomes irrelevant once we step outside the teleological developmental model in which questions of size, linear continuity, and influence are viewed as the only measures of historic importance and interest. More to the point is that the entire cultural-literary context from which Arab Jewish and other non-Ashkenazi writers emerged has been occluded from Hebrew literary discourse (as well as studies of modern Jewish culture more generally). There is an unacknowledged history of modern Jewish cultural production in the East, in Hebrew as well as in other Jewish and standard languages (e.g., Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Arabic, classical

Arabic, Turkish, Persian). These writings need to be recovered, examined, and contextualized within the social, political, and cultural trends and movements of their own time and place.

Due to numerous societal factors (e.g., censorship laws, lack of access to printing, rapid cultural and political changes), nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jewish writing in the Arab world, which is the focus of my own research, progressed in fits and starts—in different “bursts,” each of which had a different character. There is thus no direct, seamless linkage between the activities of writers in different moments (such as late nineteenth-century Cairo or 1940s Baghdad), let alone between their writings and those of contemporary Mizraḥi authors in Israel. Nonetheless, there are connections of sorts. In broad strokes, the nineteenth-century modernization of the Middle East—and the participation of Jews therein—created a set of social and cultural conditions that would facilitate the emergence of modern Arab writers, including the Jews among them. Despite the lack of a direct connection between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jewish writing in the Arab world, in all instances the authors were responding to the overarching imperative of cultural modernity. In this light, the activities of nineteenth-century Jewish writers in the Arab world were part of a larger, ongoing negotiation of cultural modernity that continued well into the mid-twentieth century, and in which Jews participated in several fields (literature, journalism, music, cinema, etc.).

Furthermore, although Arab Jewish and Mizraḥi writings from various historic moments may not be linked directly to the writing of earlier moments, in all cases they have responded to similar pressures and possibilities. First and foremost, all the authors were or are members of a cultural minority (whether as Jews writing in Arabic in a predominantly Muslim society, as Arab Jews participating in a Hebrew enlightenment movement centered in Europe, or currently, as Mizraḥim working under Ashkenazi sociocultural hegemony in Israel). They all have needed to make certain choices in order to position themselves within the relevant cultural sphere or movement (e.g., the Arabic literary renaissance, the Hebrew Haskalah, or contemporary Israeli literature). The texts produced in these various moments shed light on how Jewish writers in the modern Arab world or with roots therein have chosen to navigate competing cultural options, how they have incorporated the different

influences available to them (from Hebrew, Arabic, and European languages and cultures) into their writing, and how such choices have changed along with the changing circumstances of production.

Of the Mizraḥi authors currently writing in Israel, Ballas, as a scholar of Arabic literature, probably makes the most overt usage of the Arabic literary heritage in his works, basing characters upon historical figures such as the nineteenth-century Egyptian Jewish writer Ya‘qub Ṣanu‘ and the well-known Iraqi Jewish convert to Islam, the historian Aḥmad Sousa.<sup>13</sup> But second- and third-generation Israelis continue to reimagine elements of the Levantine or Arab cultural pasts, as in Ronit Matalon’s dialogue with the Anglophone Egyptian-Israeli writer Jacqueline Kahanoff in *Zeh ‘im ha-panim eleynu* (The One Facing Us; 1995) or Almog Behar’s hallucinatory longings for his Iraqi Jewish grandfather’s Arabic language and culture in *Ana min al-yahud* (I Am One of the Jews; 2008). Such texts demand a reassessment of the cultural worlds that contemporary Hebrew literature inhabits: worlds that merge Cairo with Tel Aviv, Baghdad with Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, Mizraḥi literature is an Israeli cultural phenomenon, and yet these creative manipulations of cultural residue, these “hauntings” of lost worlds, tie much Mizraḥi writing to histories and contexts outside the purview of mainstream Hebrew literary scholarship.

On this point, I reiterate and expand upon Ammiel Alcalay’s argument in *After Jews and Arabs*. Alcalay’s groundbreaking book seeks to “trace the development and erosion of the qualities of mobility, diversity, autonomy, and translatability possessed by the Jews of the Levant”; in so doing, it examines relationships between Jews and Arabs in “paradigmatic historical moments and encounters” and attempts to reinscribe Jews as native to the Levant.<sup>15</sup> In its panoramic and somewhat idiosyncratic sweep across time and space, the book focuses on two historic moments: al-Andalus/Sepharad and the 1930s–present Israel/Palestine.<sup>16</sup> The book is self-avowedly *not* a literary history, nor is its critique directed at Hebrew literary historiography.<sup>17</sup> In recovering Arab Jewish source texts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in attempting to trace their relationship to texts produced in other (European and non-European) centers of Jewish culture, my intention is to bring the Arab Jewish/Levantine past into dialogue with the scholarly discourse on Jewish cultural and literary modernity.<sup>18</sup>

Related questions of the myriad cultural influences informing Mizraḥi writing await further exploration. In the pages that follow, I will consider the state of Hebrew literary historiography in relation to Mizraḥi writing, suggest potential directions for revision, and then briefly outline the contours of modern Arab Jewish textual production beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. I conclude the essay with an analysis of a Hebrew poem written in Baghdad in 1920 and a preliminary discussion of the cultural influences that have shaped the work of Sami Michael and Shimon Ballas.

## I. HEBREW CANON FORMATION AND MIZRAḤI WRITING

As early as 1997, Nancy Berg argued (perhaps somewhat prematurely) that “Sephardi [i.e., Sephardi and Mizraḥi] writers are redrawing the literary map, whether claiming their rightful place in the existing canon, or contributing to a new canon.”<sup>19</sup> This observation would now seem to hold true at least for Michael and Matalon, whose works are at the center of current Hebrew literary discourse. Nonetheless, while Mizraḥi writings are applauded as beacons of the pluralism or “multiculturalism” of contemporary Hebrew writing, the discourse on the *history* of Hebrew literature remains mostly unaltered. This is the case even in recent studies of canon formation in Hebrew literature that explicitly adopt a revisionist perspective and aim to disclose the ideological factors and power relations influencing the canon selection.

For example, consider three English-language studies on Hebrew literature that appeared in 2002–2003, by Hannan Hever, Michael Gluzman, and Rachel Feldhay Brenner. All three books make significant contributions to the field in other ways, yet continue to exclude non-Ashkenazi writers from the narrative of Hebrew literary history. Michael Gluzman’s otherwise commendable 2003 book on the politics of canonicity in modern Hebrew poetry (which focuses on the pre-State period) draws attention to marginalized women and diasporic writers yet says nothing about the question (or even the existence) of non-Ashkenazi writers.<sup>20</sup> Hever’s *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (2002) states in the introduction that “Palestinian and Arabic

Jewish (Mizraḥi) minority literary discourses, together with nonhegemonic Ashkenazi Jewish literary discourses, play a significant role in the creation of the national canon.<sup>21</sup> But while the book devotes two full chapters to Palestinian writers in Israel (Emile Habiby and Anton Shammas), the only Mizraḥi writer it discusses is Shimon Ballas, who figures briefly in one chapter.<sup>22</sup> The book gives no attention to non-Ashkenazi writers either during the pre-State years or in the “statehood generation,” so if indeed these writers played a role in the national canon, they do not play a role in Hever’s study thereof. However, in the newer, Hebrew-language version, *Ha-Sipur ve-ha-le’om* (Narrative and the Nation; 2007), Hever addresses this imbalance by including additional chapters on Shami and Burla (as well as a chapter on Matalon).<sup>23</sup>

In her book *Inextricably Bonded* (2003), Rachel Brenner also returns to formative moments in the story of Hebrew literature and Zionist thought, in this case juxtaposing canonical male writers (S. Yizhar, A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, David Grossman) with male Arab Israeli writers (Atallah Mansour, Habiby, Shammas) to question the implicit separation of Jew and Arab. In her analysis, “the interaction between Jews and Arabs defies the Zionist concept of national identity based on separation from the Arab and imitation of the enlightened European.”<sup>24</sup> Yet Brenner does not consider what the Zionist dependency upon European recognition and approval, and Israel’s ensuing emulation of the West, may have meant for a large segment of the *Jewish* population of Israel—Mizraḥim and Sephardim. The Sephardi/Arab-Jewish past is elided, for instance, from Brenner’s evocation of the impassioned objections of Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche, one of Tel Aviv’s founders, to the Zionist myth of an “empty” land. While pointing out that Chelouche’s words seem to anticipate post-Zionist thought, Brenner omits the information that is key to understanding his apparently prescient position: Chelouche was the scion of an important Sephardic family of Maghrebi origin and a member of a group of Arabic-speaking Palestinian Jews (i.e., “native” Jews) that, while in favor of Jewish settlement, envisioned a shared Arab-Jewish homeland.<sup>25</sup> If read within the historic context of the Arabic-speaking “native” Jews, Chelouche’s viewpoint on mainstream Ashkenazi Zionism appears neither exceptional nor surprising.

Hebrew-language studies such as Hever’s *Ha-Sipur ve-ha-le’om* as well as those of Yitzḥak Laor and Yigal Schwartz have done more to acknowledge the exclusion

of non-Ashkenazi writers from the historiography, even if they themselves do not rectify the problem.<sup>26</sup> Laor's *Anu kotvim otakh moledet* (We Write You, Homeland; 1995) does not discuss Mizrahi writers but does include a brilliant critique of A. B. Yehoshua's conflicted treatment of Sephardi/Mizrahi identity vis-à-vis Israeli identity.<sup>27</sup> Schwartz's introduction to *Mah she-ro'im mi-kan* (The View from Here; 2005), "Thoughts on a Hundred Years of Hebrew Literary Historiography," posits that the most recent wave of historiography (from the 1980s to the present) is indebted to postmodernist and postcolonial theory and committed to the recovery of suppressed and marginalized voices (à la the "minority discourse" model), including those of women, Mizrahi, and Arab authors.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, Schwartz's own subjects are primarily canonical, Ashkenazi male authors.

Finally, although this particular facet is not the focus of the current article, the Hebrew novels and stories of "native" (Sephardi) Jews in the old Yishuv constitute another understudied chapter of modern Hebrew literature. As Nancy Berg notes: "At the time writers such as Shaul Tchernichovsky and Haim Bialik were making Odessa the center for Hebrew literary activity, Yehuda Berla, Yitzhak Shami, and Yaakov Hurgin (a little later) were writing in authentic native voices in Eretz Yisrael (Palestine)."<sup>29</sup> In his chapter on Shami in *Ha-Sipur ve-hale'om*, Hever locates him within a "particularly complex politics of identity" whereby Shami was writing according to the accepted norms, which already "governed all Hebrew writing as the national Jewish literature, while expressing an entirely different cultural perspective."<sup>30</sup> Although Hever's chapter is a welcome addition to the material on Shami, we still await a revisionist study of Hebrew literature at the time of state formation that holistically incorporates Shami and Burla as well as other Palestinian Sephardi writers such as Shoshana Shababo, and that accounts for their multiple cultural and linguistic influences.<sup>31</sup>

The exclusion of non-Ashkenazi Jewries from the historiography of Hebrew literature parallels to the larger (and well-known) problem of their near-exclusion from the historical narrative of the "Jewish people" propagated by the Israeli state educational system.<sup>32</sup> However, given the indications of increasing willingness by Hebrew literary scholars to acknowledge Mizrahi voices, it seems that remaining obstacles are largely structural in nature. One such problem is the separation of Hebrew and Arabic within the Israeli academy. While the fields of Hebrew and

comparative literature have a long history of interaction in Israel (Tel Aviv University even recently merged them into a single department), Arabic literature remains sequestered within departments of Arabic and Islam, whose methodological approaches are grounded in theology and philology rather than critical theory and whose disciplinary perspective is insular rather than comparative. Reuven Snir, a senior professor of Arabic literature at Haifa University, attributes the exclusion of Arabic literature from comparative literary studies in Israel to the deep-seated and abiding Eurocentrism of Israeli society:

As the roots of Jewish nationalism lie in Eastern Europe and the overall orientation of modern Israeli canonical culture is predominantly Ashkenazic and Western-oriented, no wonder that Arab culture has been totally rejected by the dominant circles. There is no better illustration of this than the structure of the departments of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at Israeli universities, where one can hardly find tenured academic scholars of modern Hebrew literature or comparative literature who have a knowledge of Arabic or have taken the trouble to study the Arabic language and literature. Comparative studies can legitimately be pursued in Russian, Italian, Japanese, Polish and, of course, English, French and German, but hardly in Arabic literary works in the original.<sup>33</sup>

Even though many Hebrew literary scholars may now be receptive to comparative work with Arabic, the structural division that persists within the Israeli academy impedes the kind of comparative scholarship that could potentially open new vistas in the study of Hebrew literature and its history.

It is thus perhaps not surprising that the growing body of scholarship on contemporary Mizraḥi literature has broadened the critical perspective on Hebrew literature and Israeli culture, but without revising Hebrew literary historiography or engaging (pre-State) Arab Jewish intellectual and literary history.<sup>34</sup> Gershon Shaked was criticized for characterizing the writings of first-generation Mizraḥi writers, including Ballas and Michael, as reactions to social and cultural oppression and humiliation (*viz.*, “Once they learned the language and were able to express them-

selves in it, they gave voice to their bitterness against the ruling groups”).<sup>35</sup> In newer, more theoretically sophisticated studies, however, Mizrahi literature (when so defined) is still read primarily for its oppositional qualities. Hever, in particular, initiated the study of Mizrahi and Palestinian writing in Israel through the critical lenses of minority writing and postcolonial theory, and even without knowledge of Arabic or of the source texts of Arab culture, he succeeded in making Mizrahi and Palestinian authors a permanent facet of Israeli literary discourse. As has been discussed in depth by Hever, Alcalay, and others, Mizrahi writing offers a compelling counter-narrative: a representation of Israeli culture, society, and identity that contests the hegemonic Ashkenazi-Zionist narrative.<sup>36</sup> In this vein, subsequent scholarship produced in Israel has remained focused on the formation and representation of Mizrahi identity and experience in Israel, exploring important facets such as literary representations of the Mizrahi body or the *ma'abarab* (immigrant “transit camp”).<sup>37</sup> Hebrew literary scholarship produced in the United States, where disciplinary borders are more flexible, has taken a somewhat broader temporal and geographic perspective on Mizrahi writing. Nancy Berg’s pioneering book on Israeli writers from Iraq, published in 1996, devotes a chapter to literature written by Jews in Baghdad, thereby establishing some continuity between the Iraqi past and the Israeli present.<sup>38</sup> Gil Hochberg’s 2008 study, through not directly concerned with Hebrew literary history, considers Arab Jewish identity outside the Israeli context and juxtaposes Mizrahi writing in Israel with North African writing in French.<sup>39</sup> Overall, however, in studies produced in both Hebrew and English, the criticism of Mizrahi writing in Israel remains largely fixated on its dialectical relationship to Zionism—an approach that ultimately reaffirms the centrality of Zionism to Israeli cultural discourse. To broaden the discourse, we might begin by contemplating some of the following questions: How can contemporary Mizrahi writers be understood or appreciated as historic subjects (and agents) in a context *other* than that of the struggle for cultural determination in Israel? What might the Mizrahi writer bring to the proverbial table that is *not* a direct product of the encounter with Israeliness? How can we go beyond the hermeneutics of “hybridity” in our reading of Mizrahi texts? Reading Mizrahi literature comparatively, in conjunction with writing produced in other times and places, would seem an obvious place to begin.

## THE MAP OF HEBREW LITERATURE AND JEWISH WRITING IN THE EAST

If by the 1940s budding Jewish writers in Baghdad such as Ballas and Michael were fully engrossed in the expanding Arabic literary sphere to the exclusion of Hebrew, this had not always been the case. To the contrary, from the mid-nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth century, Jews in Baghdad and elsewhere throughout the Arabic-speaking world were active participants in the revival of the Hebrew language and creation of modern Hebrew letters. As I will discuss in more detail shortly, while the Haskalah was experienced and expressed differently in Europe and the non-Ashkenazi world, an interconnected Hebrew revival did take place in both spheres. I would thus begin the revision of Hebrew literary history with a multilingual model of Haskalah that emphasizes reciprocal channels of cultural circulation and transmission between Europe, Africa, and Asia. The second phase of the revision should be a study of twentieth-century Jewish writing in the Middle East that, again, is not restricted to Hebrew, but illuminates the role of Hebrew writing within a dynamic and heteroglossic regional polysystem. My proposed historic revision complements ongoing efforts to resituate the story of modern Ashkenazi Hebrew writing within the polysystem of Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian and/or other European languages.<sup>40</sup> Like many scholars of Hebrew and Yiddish, I believe it makes little sense to study the development of Hebrew literature as though it were a national literature that developed in a predominantly monolingual Hebrew environment beginning a century before there was a Hebrew-speaking nation. Rather, I contextualize modern Hebrew within the larger, heteroglossic cultural systems in which it developed, and read it through its interactions with other languages and with cultural movements or ideological trends. The comprehensive study of Jewish writing I advocate would thus be written not as a single-stranded diachronic narrative, but as a cluster of synchronic strands with some overlap. In other words, I see it not as a trajectory of linear development (a “connect-the-dots” approach), but in the form of a messier, zigzagging picture in which different cultural movements or trends overlapped and intersected, some dying out altogether or disappearing for a time and then evolving into different forms. In this approach, I also follow the work of critics such as Linda Hutcheon

and Stephen Greenblatt, who question the national, monolingual model of literary history, “a model that has always been premised on ethnic and often linguistic singularity, not to say purity.”<sup>41</sup> These two phases—the revision of the Haskalah narrative as one of transregional circulation and the study of twentieth-century Middle Eastern and North African Jewish thought and writing—are necessary steps toward the creation of an inclusive Hebrew literary and cultural history.<sup>42</sup>

It is widely thought that the modern literary production of Middle Eastern and North African Jewries was limited to “traditional” realms such as rabbinic or liturgical genres (e.g., *respona* and *piyyut*), *musar* (ethical-devotional) literature, and folklore. While nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish writers in the East did in fact produce writing on worldly topics (journalistic essays, descriptive ethnographies, stories, plays, etc.), they did not conceptualize their writing as either “religious” or “secular”—a categorical distinction that was not endemic to their worldview. As Ammiel Alcalay notes, “For contemporary Jewish literary history, a number of other particular problems [in studying Levantine texts] exist. Difficulties are often found in trying to fully reconcile writing that emerges from a religious environment with writing that doesn’t.”<sup>43</sup> Hence, we should adjust our expectations concerning such typologies of thought and writing before approaching the texts in question. For the purposes of this essay, when I say *secular* (for lack of a better term), I mean writing that falls outside the recognized rabbinic and liturgical genres and does not carry the weight of religious authority.

If non-Ashkenazi Jewries did not read modernity as a crisis of tradition, however, this does not mean that they were not aware of and engaged in activities we now associate with Jewish cultural modernity. Sephardi and Arab Jews are not believed to have participated in the modern “renaissance” or “enlightenment” movements of either Hebrew or Arabic, known respectively as the Haskalah and the Nahḍa. In fact, Jews in communities throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and India played active roles in both movements. I believe their contributions have been obscured largely because the histories of these movements were absorbed into the respective narratives of Zionism and Arab nationalism, neither of which could accommodate Arab Jews or their viewpoints on topics such as Zionism, the Hebrew revival, and the place of Jews within the emerging Arab collective. As a result, what has been forgotten is this: in the late nineteenth

century, in places like Baghdad, Beirut, and Cairo, Jewish intellectuals wrote in Hebrew and Arabic on seminal topics ranging from linguistic and cultural revival to the Dreyfus affair to women's rights to Egyptian independence. A few examples of their writings include a Hebrew newspaper published in Baghdad beginning in 1863, a 1903 Arabic-language biography of Émile Zola, and a 1909 Arabic-language elucidation of the Talmud written for a mainstream Arab readership.<sup>44</sup> Nineteenth-century Jewish writers also published plays, poetry, and a handful of short stories in Hebrew and Arabic.<sup>45</sup>

Works in Hebrew and standard Arabic, however, form a small part of modern Middle Eastern Jewish literary production. By contrast, the outpouring of Judeo-Arabic literature from the same period was enormous. Until the twentieth century, most literate Jewish men and women in the Arabic-speaking world learned to read only in Hebrew characters, but knowledge of Hebrew itself was reserved for the educated elite. If we split the phenomenon of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writing of Arab Jews into its three linguistic strands, namely Judeo-Arabic, Hebrew, and standard (also called "literary" or "classical" Arabic; i.e., *fuṣḥā*), we find that the quantity of Judeo-Arabic texts easily outnumbers both Hebrew and standard Arabic.<sup>46</sup> Of course, each language also performed a different function within the polysystem: Judeo-Arabic was the language of popular literature, Hebrew the medium of maskilic-style literature, and standard Arabic the domain of a small group of intellectuals.<sup>47</sup> In this respect, the role of Judeo-Arabic in the Middle East parallels that played by Yiddish in Europe. Indeed, the triad of Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, and standard Arabic was quite similar to that formed by Hebrew, Yiddish, and standard European languages. In Turkey and the Balkans, Judeo-Spanish constituted an element of the literary polysystem, and in the nineteenth century a large amount of translation activity took place between Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Arabic as materials were transmitted back and forth between the Ladino and Arabic-speaking Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire; for instance, large sections of *Me-am lo'ez*, "the mid-eighteenth-century encyclopedia of Bible stories and folktales," were translated from Judeo-Spanish into Judeo-Arabic.<sup>48</sup> Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Spanish folk literature and *musar* literature thus constituted the large part of the secular Jewish writing published in the Ottoman Empire and throughout the East.

The popularity of Judeo-Arabic printing, coupled with the emergence of Hebrew periodical literature in Europe, seems to have encouraged the growth of secular reading sensibilities and the consumption of print culture among Jewish readers in the East. In this period, a particularly popular subgenre of Judeo-Arabic literature emerged in the form of long novelistic narratives about biblical characters (prophets, kings, queens, and heroes), compiled from a mixture of canonical Jewish and Islamic sources and translated from the original Hebrew and Arabic. One such narrative, *Qiṣṣat Yusuf al-ṣādiq* (The Story of Joseph the Righteous), a novel of more than one hundred pages, was originally printed in Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic in Calcutta, and reprinted in Baghdad in 1892. It enjoyed such widespread circulation that it was reprinted yet again in both Aden and North Africa, at either extreme of the Arab world. This type of narrative literature may have acted as a bridge between traditional Jewish literary genres and the European novels then making forays into the Jewish world via Hebrew translation. During this period, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Spanish also acquired a new function as the languages of modern periodicals.<sup>49</sup> In the Arab Jewish context, it is noteworthy that Iraqi Jews residing in Bombay and Calcutta printed newspapers in Judeo-Arabic continuously from 1856 (the same year *Ha-Magid* was founded) until 1902. The periodicals' editors, many of whom were also the owners and operators of Hebrew presses, translated stories and novellas from Hebrew and European languages and published them serially in their journals, sometimes reprinting them as bound anthologies. These translations bear witness to the circulation of Jewish literary texts between the European and non-European Jewish worlds. For instance, Avraham Mapu's *Abavat Tsiyon* (The Love of Zion; 1853) appeared in Judeo-Arabic in Tunis in the 1890s and again in Calcutta in 1896, and once more in Judeo-Persian in 1908. In Anatolia, both Hebrew and Yiddish literatures (including the works of Sholem Aleichem, Y. L. Peretz, and Sholem Asch) were translated into Judeo-Spanish.<sup>50</sup>

The 1896 edition of *Abavat Tsiyon* was translated and printed by an Iraqi Jewish *maskil*, Rav Shlomo Twena, owner and operator of the Calcutta Hebrew press. A prolific writer and translator, Twena published most of his literary translations serially in his weekly Judeo-Arabic newspaper *Magid mesbarim* (1890–1900

or 1901), which featured a literary supplement (“Magid mishneh”).<sup>51</sup> His translations from Hebrew to Judeo-Arabic include Ludwig Philippson’s *Sefer tsadik nose’a* and *Sefer tsadik ve-nisgav* (translated to Hebrew from the original German by Meir Estarinski and Naḥum Sokolov), as well as the immensely popular Gothic novel *Misterey pariz* (*Les mystères de Paris*) by Eugène Sue (translated into Hebrew, possibly via German or Russian, by the Vilna *maskil* Kalman Schulman and published in installments between 1857 and 1860).<sup>52</sup> Earlier, in 1863, another Baghdadi *maskil* named Barukh Moshe Mizraḥi had established the first modern printing press in Baghdad: a lithographic Hebrew press, which he used to print a Hebrew newspaper, *Ha-Dover*. Published intermittently through 1871 (printing was subject to license by the reluctant Ottoman authorities), *Ha-Dover* was in direct dialogue (and competition) with Hebrew newspapers from both Europe and the East, indeed reprinting some of its material from other Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic newspapers such as *Ha-Magid*, *Ha-Levanon*, and *Doresh Tob le-’ammo*. Some of its foreign news was translated into Hebrew from the French newspapers *Le Telegraph* and *Le République*.<sup>53</sup>

While literature was not its primary focus, *Ha-Dover* did feature occasional literary items. For instance, a story with the rather voluminous title “The Chronicles of Don Yosef Ben Efraim: A Lovely and Even Pleasant Tale of the Events That Took Place in the Land of Spain in the City of Castille in the Fifteenth Century, Written and Published in the Language of Ashkenaz [Yiddish or German] and Translated into Hebrew” was printed in *Ha-Levanon* and then republished serially in *Ha-Dover*.<sup>54</sup> *Ha-Dover* attributed the story’s origins to a manuscript in “the language of Ashkenaz,” a claim it reiterated in a later installment.<sup>55</sup> However, the story is actually a rewriting of the “Chronicle of Alfonso XI” from Solomon ibn Verga’s sixteenth-century *Shevet Yehudah* (The Scepter of Judah).<sup>56</sup> The chain of transmission of this rewriting thus leads us from a Hebrew manuscript written by a Sephardi exile in sixteenth-century Turkey to a later Yiddish version, which was then retranslated back into Hebrew in nineteenth-century Jerusalem and reprinted once again in a Hebrew newspaper in Baghdad. Paper trails of this sort, while constituting fascinating stories in and of themselves, also indicate the porous boundaries between “Ashkenaz” and “Sepharad” in modern Hebrew culture.

None of this material, however, informs the historiography of the Hebrew Haskalah, which is viewed as the product of what might be dubbed the “long nineteenth century” (1770s–1890s) of European Jewry.<sup>57</sup> The literary geography of the Haskalah should in fact be identical with the global map of Jewish life, for by the close of the nineteenth century there was hardly a community that had not been touched in some way by the Hebrew revival and its modernizing agenda. Maskilic circles congregated in places as distant from Europe as Persia and Yemen, while Jews in Iraq and Tunisia contributed to the European Hebrew press from its very inception.<sup>58</sup> Places including Erdine, Calcutta, Baghdad, Mogador—while each distinct in its own admixture of historical circumstance, linguistic and cultural influences—were all contact points in the global network of the Jewish enlightenment. I thus suggest re-envisioning the Haskalah as an interregional (“global”) movement with channels of transmission (e.g., the Hebrew press, literary translations) that crisscrossed Europe, Asia, and North Africa. Furthermore, because much of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings produced in these areas continued to reflect the ideational paradigms and themes of the Haskalah rather than those of the *Tehiyah* (i.e., enlightenment and reform rather than national revival), the temporal limits of Haskalah should be extended beyond its conventional cutoff of 1882 and into the twentieth century.

That said, simply expanding the Haskalah’s temporal and geographic boundaries is not sufficient. Revising the historic narrative of modern Jewish culture involves more than adding new centers of activity to the existing map. Above all, it entails reassessing the historic background and relationships that come with this new territory. My proposed model of Haskalah is “global” not only in a geographic but also in an epistemological sense, for it suggests that Haskalah was produced both *by* and *through* processes of cultural (and cross-cultural) circulation.<sup>59</sup> Admittedly, at this early stage of research, the “global” view is still largely conjectural; but future research will determine the full extent of the circulation of Jewish texts. Thus, rather than studying individual cultural centers in the East in an isolated manner, I suggest researching the intellectual contacts that were forged between and among all these communities, as well as their dialogue with the centers of Haskalah activity in Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, we need to investigate how ideas and texts, when circulated throughout this poly-

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system, underwent transcultural and intercultural permutations (the aforementioned reworking of *Shevet Yehudah* in *Ha-Dover* being only one such example).<sup>60</sup> Only then will we be able to accurately reconstruct a Hebrew modernity that developed through reciprocal East-West channels of influence, within a linguistic and cultural polysystem comprised not only of the accepted triad of Hebrew, Yiddish, and European languages, but also of the literary languages (Jewish and standard) of the Middle East.<sup>61</sup> In particular, the cultural connections between Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) and Judeo-Arabic, or between standard Arabic and Judeo-Arabic, are still uncharted but potentially fertile scholarly terrain.

### HEBREW-ARABIC INTERCULTURALITY: THE HASKALAH AND THE NAḤḌA

In studying cultural connections, of course, we should consider not only the circulation of ideas and texts throughout different parts of the Jewish world, but the interaction of (non-Jewish) regional discourses with Jewish writing. The mid-to-late nineteenth century was a period of intense and explicit negotiation with modernity for both Hebrew and Arabic cultures as they underwent concurrent processes of cultural renewal. The Hebrew Haskalah and Teḥiyah are well-known to this journal's readers, and will need no definitional elaboration here. The modern Arabic renaissance, *al-nahḏa al-'arabiyya*, is presumably less familiar. From an Arabic term also connoting revival,<sup>62</sup> the Nahḏa refers to the cluster of intertwined projects of linguistic, literary, cultural, social, and religious reform carried out by Arab intellectuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily in Beirut and Cairo. The two main channels of the movement, literary revival and Islamic modernism/reform, were connected through their common experience in constructing and utilizing the emerging public sphere. Epistemologically, the Nahḏa shared much with the Haskalah. Both were fundamentally responses to Enlightenment thought and the globalization of modernity. Like the Haskalah, the Nahḏa was far from a single coherent movement. For one, it was interregional, with networks of intellectuals and ideas traversing the urban centers of Istanbul, the *masbriq* (Arab East) and North Africa; secondly, it comprised literature and science,

religion and technology, and social and political thought. While the parallels between these movements are numerous and fascinating, our primary concern here rests with the Arab Jewish writers who participated in them.

As noted, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Haskalah reached virtually every sizable Jewish community in the Middle East and North Africa. At this time maskilic writing in the *masbriq* (aside from Palestine) was produced largely in Iraq, by modernizing rabbis (*rabbanim maskilim*) such as Barukh Moshe Mizraḥi and Shlomo Bekhor Ḥuşin.<sup>63</sup> In their letters and essays, these rabbis presented the “enlightened” face of their communities, declaring that they too desired Haskalah, but on their own terms, not necessarily the same terms promoted by European *maskilim*. In the view of the modernizing rabbis, Haskalah and faith, science and Torah, went hand in hand, and so these figures strongly promoted educational reforms in the community, such as the teaching of foreign languages and of crafts (although such reforms should not be confused with secularization). They also sought to weed out superstition and to restore religion to its “true” principles—indeed, much the same agenda then being promoted in Islamic reform circles. In 1885, a Baghdad-born Jew named Sliman Menaḥem Mani, of the famous Mani family in Hebron, published a fictionalized critique of superstition in Eleazar Ben-Yehuda’s newspaper *Ha-Tsevi*. Called “Emek ha-Shedim,” Mani’s story is for now the only known example of Hebrew prose fiction by an Arab Jew in the nineteenth century, although I would venture to guess that there are other examples awaiting (re)discovery.<sup>64</sup> Examples of modern poetry, on the other hand, abound.<sup>65</sup> Notably, Sliman’s Menaḥem Mani’s brother Avraham Barukh Mani composed excellent Hebrew poetry in the style of the Italian Haskalah.

Even as these Hebrew writings were being penned in Baghdad and Palestine during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Nahḍa was underway in Beirut and Cairo. What is particularly important to note is that the Nahḍa was a regional movement whose reverberations, particularly the themes of reform and modernity, were carried to the far reaches of the Ottoman Empire, and were sounded in all its languages. Thus while figures such as Ḥuşin and Mani were well aware of the Haskalah activity then centered in Europe, we ought not assume that they would have viewed the Hebrew and Arabic “enlightenments” as distinct, self-contained, and separate projects (as they were later constructed by the mono-

lingual historiographies). It is plausible, rather, that Arabic-speaking *maskilim* may have viewed the Haskalah and Nahḍa activities to which they were privy as complementary manifestations of a transregional (even universal) zeitgeist of Enlightenment. Indeed, much of the Haskalah writing produced in the East is so similar in theme and tone to Nahḍa writing as to suggest an implicit cross-pollination of the ideas circulating throughout the region with ideas emanating from the European Hebrew press.

At the same time, a small number of Jewish intellectuals participated directly in the Nahḍa through literary activity in Arabic. It is widely believed that with the notable exception of the Egyptian Jewish playwright and journalist Ya'qub Ṣanu', Jews in this period (roughly the 1860s through World War I) did not write in literary Arabic.<sup>66</sup> In actuality, there were at least a dozen or so active Jewish writers of Arabic in Beirut and Cairo during this period, and very many more readers, some of whom contributed occasional letters to prominent Arabic-language cultural journals such as *al-Hilal* (The Crescent) and *al-Muqata'af* (The Selected).<sup>67</sup> Although these numbers sound tiny, it should be remembered that even the prominent Christian and Muslim writers of Arabic in this period numbered no more than a few dozen. In any case, the point at hand is not that Jews had a major influence on the Arabic literary renaissance, but rather, that the Arabic movement exerted an influence on *them*—demonstrating that the Jewish communities of the *mashriq* were not impervious to modern cultural trends at work in their greater societies, as has typically been thought.<sup>68</sup>

When and why did Jews begin using literary Arabic? Although there is a well-established precedence for Jews composing Arabic letters during the pre-Islamic period as well as in the Golden Age of Sepharad/al-Andalus, in later centuries, from the Spanish expulsion through the Arabic revival in the nineteenth century, literary Arabic was used but sparingly by Jews. With the educational and social reforms of the late nineteenth-century Levant, a small but growing number of Jews in Egypt, Syria, and slightly later, Iraq, began to take advantage of the new educational opportunities proffered by the Alliance Israélite Universelle, by Christian missionary schools, by new state schools and colleges, and by a handful of modern Jewish schools outside the Alliance network. One such school, Tif'eret Yisra'el, known in Arabic as al-Madrasa al-isra'iliyya al-waṭaniyya, which operated in Beirut

in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, strongly promoted Arabic language and culture. Some of the graduates of these schools came to identify with mainstream Arabic culture and became active in the Nahḍa. Prominent examples of this type of modern Arab Jewish intellectual include the Egyptian Karaite lawyer and poet Murad Farag, the Beirut-born writer and journalist Esther Azhari Moyal, her husband Shim'on Moyal of Jaffa, their son 'Abdallah 'Ovadia Nadim Moyal, and his contemporary Nissim Malul, a native of Sefad. Notably, all these figures lived for some time in either Beirut or Cairo, or both. Collectively, they left behind a fascinating trail. Between the 1890s and 1950, Murad Farag published a few dozen books on legal topics as well as four volumes of original poetry in Arabic and one volume in Hebrew, *Ha-Kodshiyot*.<sup>69</sup> At the turn of the century he also wrote and edited a newspaper in standard Arabic for the Karaite community. Esther Moyal, an intellectual far ahead of her time and a lifelong advocate of women's rights, printed a newspaper for Egyptian women between 1899 and 1904, and later helped her husband Shim'on run a short-lived Arabic-language newspaper in Jaffa. Moved by Zola's pivotal role in the Dreyfus affair, in 1903 she published an Arabic-language biography of the French writer (some of whose novels she had previously translated into Arabic). Her opinions on Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations in the Yishuv were also voiced in the Palestinian Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Tsevi*. In addition to Farag and the Moyals, a handful of other figures published books in Arabic, and numerous other Jewish readers contributed letters to the aforementioned Arabic cultural journals.

Although much of the literary production of nineteenth-century Arab Jewish intellectuals has doubtless been lost, even its vestiges demonstrate that the Nahḍa encompassed not only Muslims and Christians, but all the religious communities in the region, including the Jews. They also attest to the fact that Jews were not excluded from the emerging public sphere that prefigured the rise of Arab nationalism. In short, the participation of Arab Jews in the Nahḍa as well as in the Haskalah illustrates their engagement with cultural modernity. As these two movements ran their course in the region, and their twin nodes of enlightenment and reform were increasingly supplanted by the powerful tropes of the nation and of pan-Arab identity, twentieth-century Arab Jewish writing in Egypt and Iraq reemerged waving the banner of the national project.

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## BAGHDADI JEWS AND CULTURAL MODERNITY: “BAT BAVEL”

Let us now turn to the specific case of Baghdadi Jews. In the nineteenth century, Baghdad was still a conservative, traditional city on the periphery of Nahḍa activity. Although the cultural journals issuing from Beirut and Cairo did find subscribers in Baghdad, and there is anecdotal evidence that some members of the Jewish community may have read Arabic-language journals such as *al-Muqtataf*, thus far I have found no record of nineteenth-century Baghdadi Jewish readers writing letters to these journals or publishing their own works in standard Arabic. However, in the late nineteenth century, with the establishment of a succession of presses, Baghdad became a major center of Hebrew printing in the East.<sup>70</sup> The community also began a program of educational reform beginning in the 1860s which, by the first decade of the twentieth century, began producing a particular type of modern Arab Jewish intellectual: one doubly conversant in Hebrew learning and in Arabic and/or Ottoman culture.<sup>71</sup>

Following the Young Turk revolt in 1908, Turkish and Arabic enjoyed a brief flowering in the Jewish community, whose members produced a handful of newspapers and even a few books in those languages. This incipient process was interrupted during World War I, when the Ottomans halted publishing and conscripted Jews into their army. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the end of Turkish rule, and the commencement of the British mandate, the Jewish community of Baghdad underwent an accelerated process of cultural modernization and secularization. Furthermore, in its early years during the 1920s, the newly established Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq strongly emphasized an inclusive local nationalism for all its inhabitants, and promoted the teaching of Arabic language and culture as a unifying measure. The new national mood, combined with the prominent British presence, led the Jewish community simultaneously toward Western and Arab cultural influences, so that Baghdadi Jews acquired knowledge both of literary Arabic and of European languages; even as they became more Western in their cultural tastes and attitudes, they also became more and more integrated into the emerging Iraqi public sphere.<sup>72</sup>

The 1920s and early 1930s were the most liberal and perhaps cosmopolitan period in modern Iraqi history. It was then that a new generation of fully Arabized

Iraqi Jewish intellectuals began to emerge. Figures such as Murad Mikhail, Mir Bašri, Anwar Sha'ul, Ya'qub Bilbul, and Shalom Darwish penned Arabic verse and wrote precursors of the modern short story in Iraq. Sha'ul, an Iraqi patriot who remained in Baghdad until 1971, was the first editor of *al-Miṣbah* (*Ha-Menorah*, 1924–1929), an Arabic-language Jewish newspaper published in Baghdad; in 1929 he became publisher of the important literary weekly *al-Ḥašid* (*The Reaper*). As Orit Bashkin has demonstrated, *al-Miṣbah* tried to advocate a double-stranded Zionist and Iraqi-nationalist agenda; it covered the activities of Zionist leaders in Palestine while printing patriotic Iraqi poems by Jewish writers (a dual orientation that was possible only during the 1920s).<sup>73</sup> At the same time, the journal also played a role in the history of modern Iraqi literature by providing a forum for some of the first short stories published in Iraq.

The entry of Iraqi Jews into Arabic literature in the 1920s was accompanied by a brief rebirth of modern Hebrew writing in Baghdad, partly influenced by contacts between the community and the Yishuv and by the dispatching of modern Hebrew teachers to Iraq.<sup>74</sup> The Hebrew cultural option was epitomized by a short-lived bilingual Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic cultural journal, *Yeshurun*, produced by a Zionist association called Agudat 'Ivrit Sifrutit or in Arabic, al-Jam'iyya al-Isra'iliyya al-Adabiyya (in English, the Baghdad Hebrew Literary Society). Led initially by Shlomo Ḥiyya (who was murdered in 1920) and then Salman Shina (later, the publisher of *al-Miṣbah*), the group apparently had several hundred members at its peak.<sup>75</sup> In 1920–1921, it produced five issues of the journal.

*Yeshurun's* first edition reflects a transitional moment for Iraqi Jewry, one in which the community stood at a cultural crossroads. Would it embrace the path of Iraqi independence and Arab identity, turn toward European horizons, or, invoking its identity as the oldest Jewish diaspora, choose Hebrew nationalism? The patriotic Iraqi route proved the most popular, at least until late in the 1940s. Nonetheless, the members of the Hebrew literary society believed that the inveterate Iraqi Jewish community had a special and necessary role to play in the Hebrew cultural revival, and sought to expound it in their publication. In its inaugural issue, *Yeshurun* defined itself as a “literary, social, and historical newspaper” (*'iton sifrutit, ḥevrati, ve-histori*) and delivered an impassioned manifesto stressing the importance of newspapers in the cultural and political life of a community.<sup>76</sup>

One didactic poem that appears in the first issue seems to encapsulate the newspaper's message and tenor, but also (perhaps unwittingly) reveals the extent of the cultural Arabization of educated Iraqi Jewry in this period. Entitled "Bat Bavel" (Daughter of Babylon), the poem was penned by a writer and educator named Salim (Shlomo) Yiṣḥaq Nissim. The late scholar of Iraqi Jewry Avraham Ben-Ya'akov describes him as one of the progressive *maskilim* of Baghdad who worked in the fields of education, law, and the judiciary. Nissim published two books in Judeo-Arabic (1907 and 1910), followed by two volumes in Hebrew: *Lekah tov* (A Good Lesson; 1912), an instructional book for students of Hebrew, and *Derekh tovim* (The Way of the Righteous; 1938), a collection of his *shirey musar* (didactic poems).<sup>77</sup> He also published four poems in *Yeshurun* during the journal's short run.

Nissim's first poem for the journal invokes an old biblical persona, Bat Bavel, but he retrofits it with a new identity. Bat Bavel appears in Prophets as a harlot, a fallen woman, who, representing the ancient Babylonian kingdoms that oppressed the Israelites, has incurred God's wrath and will be brought down and humiliated.<sup>78</sup> (Another well-known biblical "daughter" is Bat Tsiyon, the Daughter of Zion, a collocation used throughout the Bible and liturgical tradition to represent Israel.) In the poem, Bat Bavel undergoes a transvaluation; far from representing the conquering, rapacious Babylonian enemy, this new "daughter of Babylon" symbolizes the modern-day Babylonian Jews. The poem thus replaces "Daughter of Zion" with "Daughter of Babylon" as the personification of Jewish collective identity. Indeed, the poem in its entirety is addressed to this "daughter" in the imperative, beginning "Uri bat bavel em ha-talmud" (Awake, daughter of Babylon, mother of the Talmud!) and continuing,

Return to your ancient past  
 Aid your sister with education and culture  
 And the people of Israel will once more be a nation.

Awake, daughter of Babylon, mother of knowledge  
 Take up in your hand the pen of literature  
 Cast ignorance behind you  
 And be a source of great redemption to your people.

Undo the cuffs, release the binds,  
 Those tethers of dormant beliefs,  
 Gather lilies and flowers  
 From the field of the patriarchs' land.

Show [your] strength in knowledge of languages and the sciences  
 But turn not away from the Prophets  
 Open the Book of Chronicles  
 And know the greatness of Israel amongst nations.

Exiled daughter of Babylon  
 Abandon not the language of [our] parents,  
 Teach your language, Hebrew,  
 Lest you be scorned amongst the nations.

Take *Yeshurun* in hand [or: Take Israel by the hand]  
 And become a blooming bud  
 With the courage of Yehoshua Bin Nun.  
 Find yourself spiritual repose.

The original Hebrew reads as follows:

עורי בת בכל אם התלמוד  
 שובי אל עברך הקדום  
 עזרי אחותך בחנוך ותרבנות  
 וישוב עם ישראל ללאם.

עורי בת בכל אם הדעות  
 החזיקי ידך בעט ספרות  
 השליכי אחר גוף סכלות  
 ויהי לעמך רב תשועות.

הסירי הזיקים, פתחי ככלים  
 כבלי דעות רדומות  
 לקטי שושנים ופרחים  
 משדי ארץ אבות.

הִרְאִי עֵז בִּידֵיעַת הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת וְהַמְדַּעִים  
 אוֹלָם אֵל תְּטִי מֵאַחֲרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים  
 פִּתְחֵי סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים  
 וְדַעִי מֵהַ גְּדוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַמִּים.

בַּת בְּבֶל הַנְּקֵרִית  
 אֵל תְּטֹשִׁי שֵׁפֶת הַיָּרִים  
 לְמַדִּי לְשׁוֹנֵךְ עֵבְרִית  
 וְאֵל תְּהִי לְבוֹז בְּעַמִּים.

הַחֲזִיקִי יָדְךָ בִּישְׂרוֹן  
 וְהִיָּה לְצִיץ פֹּרֶחַ  
 בְּאַמְץ לֵב בּוֹ-נֹן  
 מִצְּאִי לָךְ מְנוּחַ.

The poem's opening line encapsulates its striking Arabic-Hebrew interculturality. It seems an obvious allusion to Yehuda Leib Gordon's seminal 1863 poem "Hakitsah, 'ami," which begins, "Hakitsah, 'ami! 'Ad matay tishanah?" (Awake, my people! How long will you slumber?)—but it resonates equally with the nineteenth-century Lebanese writer Ibrahim al-Yaziji's famous line "Intabihu wa-istafiqu ya-ahl al-'arab" (Arise, oh Arab people, and awake!), which in turn was later adopted as the epigraph of *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius's classic history of Arab nationalism, published in 1938.<sup>79</sup> The theme of "awakening," only one of the many tropes common to Nahḍa and Haskalah discourses, was prevalent throughout the regional literatures of the former Ottoman Empire from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The speaker's exhortation of the "Daughter of Babylon" to "return" to her "ancient past," likewise, echoes the rhetoric of the Salafiyya movement within Islamic modernism, which called for a return to the "pure" past of early Islam—an idea propagated by a number of Iraqi writers, including Nissim's contemporary, the great Iraqi poet Jamil Ṣidqī al-Zawahī.<sup>80</sup> In fact, the ideational thrust of the poem seems even closer to the discourse of the Nahḍa than to that of the Haskalah. Lev Hakak's analysis of the poem, which focuses on Gordon's intertext, notes that Nissim's message diverges from Gordon's in its relationship to the past.<sup>81</sup> Gordon's poem is not about a

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return to an idealized past of greatness that could serve as a model for the future, but rather about a departure for a new horizon, entailing a radical break from the past. While Gordon famously exhorted his audience: “Heyeh adam be-tse’etekha vi-yehudi be-oholekha” (Be a person outside and a Jew at home), Nissim’s speaker seems to encourage the reader to be both a “person” (in the humanistic sense of an educated, modern citizen) and a Jew both publicly *and* privately. Indeed, throughout the poem, the speaker urges Bat Bavel to acquire *both* secular and Hebrew learning, with an equal emphasis devoted to the twain. This agenda is a direct continuation of the position advocated by nineteenth-century Iraqi *maskilim* such as Barukh Moshe Mizrahi and Shlomo Bekhor Hūsin; as mentioned, Middle Eastern Jewry did not experience modernity as a “crisis” of faith but as something more akin to a “retooling.”

In short, while the poem is probably in dialogue with Gordon’s poem, it is also—and perhaps even more so—a product of its own place and time, of the ideals that were then current in Arab culture and society, attitudes that the speaker adapts to a Jewish context. The speaker’s injunction to embrace modern forms of knowledge, using the very modern, even technical or vocational Hebrew terms *hinukh*, *tarbut*, *sifrut*, and *ha-mada’im*—“education,” “culture,” “literature,” and “sciences”—as well as the call to cast behind ignorance and backwardness, are likewise equally familiar to both Haskalah and Nahḍa discourses. Where the nineteenth-century modernizing rabbis preached the inherent compatibility of Haskalah and Torah, here we have a celebration of distinctly modern concepts of knowledge and learning. What is perhaps most interesting about this section, however, is its author’s appeal to Bat Bavel to help her “sister” (presumably Ashkenazi Jewry) with these sciences, a poignant turn in light of the disparaging Ashkenazi attitudes toward Middle Eastern Jewries that Iraqi Jewish immigrants were to encounter in Israel just a few decades later.

The poem also reflects the transition from the Haskalah’s universalist “enlightenment” paradigm to the proto-nationalist stage of Teḥiyah. Nissim’s phrase “ve-yashuv ‘am yisrael la-le’om” (And the people of Israel will again be a nation), recalls the biblical phrase “ve-shavu ha-banim la-gvulam” (And the sons will return to their border; Jeremiah 31:17). Nissim, however, replaces the idea of nation as territory with that of nation as people by using the word *le’om*, a cognate

of the Arabic *umma* (“nation,” in the sense of a community), which was frequently evoked in the Arabic writing of the time. In the third stanza, Nissim calls upon Bat Bavel to “Undo the cuffs, / release the binds / Those tethers of dormant beliefs” and to “Gather lilies and flowers” from the land of the patriarchs. However, this directive is both preceded and followed by injunctions to study language and literature (especially Hebrew), implying that the said “flowers” are themselves the buds of such knowledge. The first line of the last stanza, which puns on *Yeshurun* (both the title of the periodical and a euphemism for Israel) reinforces the implied message that the greatness of Israel, to which Bat Bavel must aspire, is in fact its *knowledge*. Thus, although the poem voices a kind of cultural nationalism, it seems to advocate a spiritual rather than a physical “return.”

In its cultural nationalism, this poem complements *Yeshurun*'s opening editorial manifesto. “Bat Bavel” is addressed not to the Jewish people in its entirety (as is Gordon's poem), but rather to the *Iraqi* Jewish community; it evokes the greatness of Israel's past, but within that history, it singles out the special contribution of Babylonian Jews as the creators of the Talmud, and it calls upon the community to revive that role and reassume cultural and intellectual leadership within the Jewish world. As such, the poem can be read either as an assimilation of Nahḍa ideas into a Hebrew-cultural Zionist framework, or as an assimilation of Haskalah ideas into an Iraqi Jewish framework. Indeed, it is not unlikely that Nissim, who would have absorbed both of these discourses through his exposure to Arabic and Hebrew writing, was applying them both (whether consciously or unconsciously) to his poetic call to action.

## THE “POSTHISTORY” OF THE “PREHISTORY”: MICHAEL AND BALLAS AS ARABIC-HEBREW WRITERS

The modern Hebrew cultural experiment in Iraq, epitomized by *Yeshurun*, was ultimately short-lived. Indeed, during the three ensuing decades before the community's disintegration in 1950–1951, most Jewish writers immersed themselves in Arabic language and culture, to the detriment of Hebrew. Thus it could be said that “Bat Bavel” did respond to Nissim's call to embrace cultural modernity, but not

exactly in the manner he advocated. The turn away from the Hebrew cultural option and toward Arabic may have been due in part to Iraqi government restrictions on Hebrew instruction in independent Iraq, post-1932.<sup>82</sup> More generally, however, it reflects the integrationist path taken by the majority of Iraqi Jews in the years leading up to and following Iraq's independence. Sami Michael's writings in Arabic are indicative of the sweeping cultural Arabization of Iraqi Jews, which reached its apex during those three decades. By the end of that period, most young, acculturated writers such as Michael and Ballas would have absorbed very little, if anything, from Hebrew literature and culture. Rather, they were products of the Arabic cultural scene and of world literature, which they read either in Arabic translation or in the original French or English (Ballas, for example, was schooled at the Baghdad Alliance, and later pursued studies at the Sorbonne).

Reuven Snir has written extensively on Iraqi Jewish writers of Arabic. Of the generation to make the transition from Iraq to Israel, he notes:

Sooner or later Iraqi-Jewish writers who emigrated to Israel were confronted with the stark choice in which language they should write and communicate, that is, whether to continue to write in Arabic or to adapt to their new cultural surroundings and make the required shift in their aesthetic preference and start writing in Hebrew, in the hope of finding a new audience.

The writers who succeeded in adapting to writing in Hebrew adopted gradually the poetic *[sic]* of Hebrew literature and most of them also the Zionist narrative, while they have been still insisting on retaining various degrees of relationship to Arab culture.<sup>83</sup>

This is a succinct analysis of the situation of the first generation of Jewish writers from the Arab world. Eli 'Amir and Sami Michael (in certain of his works) have by and large adopted the Zionist narrative, eliciting tempered criticism of Israel's immigration and absorption policies but not of the ideological premises of Zionism themselves; this might be termed *bikoret be-havanah*, a "forgiving" or "sympathetic" criticism.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, anticipation of the Israeli reader's uninformed expectations may have induced writers such as 'Amir and Michael (as well

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as the Israeli-born Dorit Rabinyan) to occasionally “exoticize” their depictions of Iraq and Iran.<sup>85</sup> Other writers (particularly Ballas, but also Michael in his new novel *A'idab*), produce texts such that challenge the Israeli reader to venture far outside his or her cultural, geographical, and ideological comfort zones.<sup>86</sup> A third option was realized by the Iraqi Jewish author Samir Naqqash, who never made the transition to Hebrew at all, publishing his entire *oeuvre* in Arabic; Naqqash was thereby able to retain autonomy from the Zionist meta-narrative, although he paid the price by forfeiting his readership.<sup>87</sup>

When questioned about literary models and influences during his formative years in Iraq, Ballas noted the Arabic works of the leading Egyptian writer Taha Ḥusayn (1889–1973) and Lebanese American poet Jubran Khalil Jubran (1883–1931) in addition to the strong influence of French literature, which he read in the original.<sup>88</sup> In Iraq, Ballas viewed himself as an aspiring Iraqi writer, but he was also conscious of the challenge he faced as a Jew integrating into a mainly non-Jewish cultural milieu. Even then he knew of the previous generation of Iraqi Jewish writers of Arabic, such as Shalom Darwish and Ya'qub Bilbul; while their works did not serve him as models, their early successes in the literary field encouraged him. (Ballas adds that he was unaware that Iraqi Jews ever wrote modern Hebrew, or that Jews participated in the nineteenth-century *Nahḍa*.) After arriving in Israel, he acquired literary Hebrew through a studious reading of the works of S.Y. Agnon.<sup>89</sup> His encounter with Agnon began with *Oreah natah la-lun* (*A Guest for the Night*); although the novel's cultural content was “completely foreign” to him, he recognized the musicality of the language—a quality which he says he had also appreciated in the works of Taha Ḥusayn, and consciously tried to imitate in his own Arabic prose.

As for Sami Michael's early influences, he heavily stresses that his formative reading experiences were of world literature in Arabic translation (primarily the popular editions issuing from publishing houses in Cairo), rather than local Arabic writers; in the 1940s, Iraqi literature was still in what he calls “infantile stages.”<sup>90</sup> As opposed to Ballas, Michael says that while living in Iraq he was unaware of the literary activities of the previous generation of Iraqi Jews. His first exposure to English resulted from his communist activities, when he undertook the translation of communist manifestos from English to Arabic. In general,

Michael's outlook on literature and writing in Iraq was heavily influenced by his communist activity; he describes his formative cultural influences as "Marxist universalist." Indeed, only much later, in the 1970s and 1980s, while he had already been living in Israel for decades, was he exposed to major Arabic writers such as the Egyptians Naguib Mahfouz and Yusuf Idris. In the 1970s, he translated some of Mahfouz's works into Hebrew.

Upon arrival in Israel, Michael initially wrote and published in Arabic. A twenty-year gap stretched between the cessation of his Arabic literary activity and the appearance of his first novel in Hebrew.<sup>91</sup> In fact, the first draft of *Shavim ve-shavim yoter* (Equal and More Equal; 1974), Michael's first Hebrew novel, was written in Arabic in the 1950s, but never published.<sup>92</sup> However, Michael believes that the slow, painstaking process of learning to write in Hebrew as a second language also conferred certain advantages. In his view, because non-native Hebrew writers such as himself and Ballas were not burdened by a long literary tradition but rather sprang up within a new and cosmopolitan cultural scene, the cultural sensibility of their Hebrew writing is freer and more universal than that of their Ashkenazi predecessors.

Given that he is the leading Hebrew writer from an Arabic-speaking country, "where" might we say Sami Michael comes from? The map of his literary and cultural influences and sources must include Baghdad and Cairo as well as Russia, France, and England, and of course Tel Aviv and Haifa. In another sense, however, he also comes from a city in which Jews had been producing modern Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, and Arabic writing since the mid-nineteenth century. The histories of Arab Jewish participation in the Haskalah and Nahḍa tell us that figures like Michael and Ballas did not arrive on the Israeli literary scene from a historical vacuum. To be sure, the different writers and texts presented in this essay do not constitute a genealogy of Mizraḥi writing in the sense of a straightforward, continuous narrative of predecessors, followers, and a chain of influence. Collectively, however, they demonstrate that at different times and places, Arab Jews embraced the opportunity to participate in the modern cultural life of their broader Arab societies or of the global Jewish community, or both. Texts such as the 1870 rewriting of *Shevet Yehudah* published in *Ha-Dover*, Mani's 1885 "Emek ha-shedim," Esther Moyal's 1903 biography of Émile Zola, Shlomo Yiṣḥaq

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Nissim's 1920 "Bat Bavel," and the short stories of Darwish and Bilbul call for a remapping of the cultural roots of Jewish modernity, and furnish a sense of the cultural milieus in which Arab Jewish intellectuals operated. As for the Hebrew texts in particular, their relationships to Arabic and Judeo-Arabic impel us to reconsider the exclusion of those languages (and other Jewish languages) from the purview of Hebrew literary history. That said, these observations and suggestions should be read as points of departure; doubtless there is yet much more to be discerned from reading the story of modern Hebrew as viewed from the East.

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## NOTES

- I would like to thank Kfir Cohen, Karen Grumberg, Shaul Setter, Ilana Szobel, Chana Kronfeld, and especially the anonymous reviewer of *Prooftexts* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
- 1 Sami Michael, *Victoria*, trans. Dalya Bilu (London: Macmillan, 1995), 195–96; for Hebrew, see Sami Michael, *Viktoryah* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 1993), 175–76.
  - 2 *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection*. Dir. Samir, Zurich 2002.
  - 3 Jamal al-Din al-Afghani is considered one of the most important Islamic intellectuals and activists of the nineteenth century and was the mentor of Muḥammad Abduh, the figurehead of the Islamic reform movement. Al-Afghani was born in Afghanistan in 1838 and was trained as a religious scholar. At age eighteen, he left Afghanistan for a lifetime of wanderings through India, Iran, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and France. He died in 1897 under unclear circumstances. He is remembered, among much else, for his debate with the French philosopher Ernest Renan concerning the compatibility of Islam with modern thought and science.
  - 4 See also n. 34, below, for more reactions by Ballas to Israel's lack of basic knowledge of Arab culture and society.
  - 5 "The New," est. 1953.
  - 6 See, for instance, Eli 'Amir, *Mafriah ha-yonim* (The Pigeon Keeper) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 1992).
  - 7 Reuven Snir explores the literary and cultural background of modern Iraqi Jewish

writing and the transition from Iraq to Israel, and subsequently from Arabic to Hebrew, at length in “‘Arabs of the Mosaic Faith’: Jewish Writers in Modern Iraq and the Clash of Narratives after their Immigration to Israel,” in *Poetry’s Voice, Society’s Norms: Forms of Interaction between Middle Eastern Writers and Their Societies*, eds. Andreas Pfitsch and Barbara Winckler (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2006), 149–71. A similar (almost identical) version also appeared earlier in Snir, “‘Forget Baghdad!’ The Clash of Literary Narratives among Iraqi-Jews in Israel,” *Orientalia Suecana* LIII (2004): 143–63. For a comprehensive study of Arabic-language works by Iraqi Jews, see idem, *‘Araviyut, yahadut, tsiyonut: ma’avak zehuyot bi-yetsiratam shel yehudey ‘irak* (Arabness, Jewishness, Zionism: A Contest of Identities in the Works of Iraqi Jews) (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2005).

- 8 On this point, see “Foreword” in Ammiel Alcalay, ed., *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996), v–xii. Some of the writers I have in mind are Ronit Matalon, Dorit Rabinyan, Haviva Pedaya, Dan Benay-Seri, Shimon Adaf, Dudu Busi, and Sara Shilo.
- 9 Quoted in Manuel M. Martin-Rodrigues, “Recovering Chicano/a Literary Histories: Historiography beyond Borders,” *PMLA* 120, no. 3 (May 2005): 796–805; quotation from 797. Originally in “Der Leser als Instanz einer neuen Geschichte der Literatur,” *Poetica* 7 (1975): 325–44.
- 10 I borrow the term *invention* from Ella Shohat, “The Invention of the Mizrahim,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* XXIX, no. 1 (1999): 5–20. As I understand and employ it, the term *Mizrahi* refers to a collective identity created in Israel to distinguish the totality of Asian, African, and southeast European Jews from the population of East, Central, and West European Jews, who are collectively referred to as “Ashkenazim.” (The category *Mizrahim* has also subsumed *Sephardim*, which, technically speaking, should refer only to the descendants of Spanish exiles, rather than indigenous Asian and African Jewish communities.) In my view, because it is an Israeli-produced identity, the term *Mizrahim* should not be used to refer to Asian and African Jewish communities in their countries of origin, much as *African American* is meaningless outside the context of U.S. history and would not be used to refer to West Africans in the seventeenth century. Hence, when referring to the Jews of Arabic-speaking countries, the population that would come to form the majority of the “Mizraḥim,” I employ the term *Arab Jew(s)*. The idea of the “Arab Jew” is also a construction, as Jews in Arab lands (with the exception of a handful of intellectuals) did not see themselves as

“Arabs.” However, in recent years the term has become more widely used and recognized in academic discourse, and has the distinct advantages of avoiding the anachronism implied by the term *Mizrahim* when applied to a pre-1948 context, and of retaining a sense of cultural and linguistic association with Arabic. For more on the problem of “Arab Jewish” identity, see Emily Gottreich, “Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Maghrib,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (2008): 433–51, and Lital Levy, “Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the *Mashriq*,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (2008): 452–69.

- 11 Although I do not assume that this categorization is transparent or unproblematic, I will use the term *Mizrahi literature* to refer to the writings of Arab Jewish and Mizrahi authors, which by and large tend to be concerned with Middle Eastern geographies and cultures and/or with the experiences of Mizrahim in Israel. Of course, not all writing by Mizrahi writers is “Mizrahi literature”; for instance, the works of Orly Castel-Bloom do not sit comfortably under this rubric. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Dror Mishani, “Lamah tsrikhim ha-mizraḥim laḥzor el ha-‘ma’abarah’: Maḥshavot ‘al ha-historyografya shel ‘ha-kol ha-mizraḥi’ ba-sifrut ha-‘ivrit” (Why do Mizrahim need to return to the “ma’abarah”?: Thoughts on the historiography of the ‘mizrahi voice’ in Hebrew literature), *Mi-ta’am* 3 (2005): 91–98.
- 12 See Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, eds., *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), especially Hutcheon, chapter one, “Rethinking the National Model,” 3–43. As Hutcheon notes, literary-historic narratives of marginalized groups written with the goal of seeking inclusion often tend to replicate in structure the very narratives they critique. In her words: “Many interventionist narratives are teleological in structure simply because their politics are goal driven. This goal orientation may explain why these literary histories seem less nostalgic than utopian: they discuss the past, but they aim toward both future progress (from exclusion to inclusion) and a transformative impact on the general cultural narrative in which they move” (13).
- 13 See Shimon Ballas, *Solo* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po‘alim, 1998), and *Ve-bu aḥer* (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1991); in English, *Outcast*, trans. Ammiel Alcalay and Oz Shelach (San Francisco: City Lights, 2007).
- 14 Ronit Matalon, *Zeh ‘im ba-panim ‘eleynu* (The One Facing Us) (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘oved, 1995); idem, *The One Facing Us*, trans. Marsha Weinstein (New York: Metropolitan, 1998); Almog Behar, *Ana min al-yahud* (Tel Aviv: Hotsa’at bavel, 2008).

- 15 Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 27–28.
- 16 The book does not relate to the time period addressed in this article, except on pp. 203–4, where Alcalay briefly discusses the importance of the popular press in the Middle East for the development of modern Jewish cultural life.
- 17 Alcalay clearly states, “My work here does not, by any means, even pretend to be a comprehensive history of the life and culture of the Jews of the Levant.” *After Jews and Arabs*, 27.
- 18 For a critique of the concept of modernity vis-à-vis Hebrew literature, as well as the relation between “Hebrew literature” and “Jewish literatures,” see Gil Anidjar, “Literary History and Hebrew Modernity,” in idem, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 67–83.
- 19 See Nancy Berg, “Sephardi Writing: From the Margins to the Mainstream,” in *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, ed. Alan Mintz (Hanover, N.H. and London: Brandeis University Press, 1997), 114–42, quotation from 115. Berg discusses novels “that most overtly explore Sephardi [and Mizraḥi] identity.” She continues, “In these works by Sami Michael, Amnon Shamosh, A. B. Yehoshua, Shimon Ballas, and Dan-Banaya Seri, we can best observe the move from the margin to the center, the shift from the mainstream to Sephardi, and alternatively, the decision to remain on the outside” (ibid.). Yet while Berg depicts the different ways in which their novels challenge the hegemonic Zionist narrative, she does not explain how this “move to the center” has happened, or what it consists of: critical reception? book sales? translation into foreign languages? adoption for use in the Israeli educational curriculum? The chapter was published more than ten years ago and significant changes have taken place in Mizraḥi literature since then; yet I am not sure that Mizraḥi literature has, as yet, gone “mainstream.”
- 20 Michael Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003). For a discussion of the text that also touches upon Hever and Brenner’s books, see Adam Rovner’s review in *Prooftexts* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 248–56.
- 21 Hanan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 5.
- 22 As Nancy Berg aptly points out in her review of the book: “[D]espite the revisionary spirit moving the study, the junctures examined are mostly limited to works from

- writers of the dominant Jewish culture: Ashkenazi Jewish men.” See Berg, “Margins and Minorities in the Modern Hebrew Canon” (book review), *Prooftexts* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 240–48; quotation from 246.
- 23 Hanan Hever, *Ha-Sipur ve-ha-le’om: kri’ah bikortit be-kanon ha-sifrut ha-ivrit* (The Narrative and the Nation: A Critical Reading of the Hebrew Literary Canon; Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007). The book is based largely on the English version (*Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon*), with a few additions: chapter three on Shami, chapter four on Burla, and chapter fifteen on Matalon. Interestingly, Hever’s chapter on Matalon does not discuss her writing in relation to Mizrahi literature; his reading of *Zeh ‘im ha-panim eleynu* is concerned largely with the motif of the photographs while his criticism of *Sarab, Sarab* (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘oved, 2000) focuses on the convergence of private and public violence and the body, culminating in the novel’s closing lines on the murder of Rabin. See *Ha-Sipur ve-ha-le’om*, 329–43.
- 24 Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-visioning Culture* (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 13.
- 25 Brenner does note that he was born in 1870 in Palestine and that he “lived and worked closely with Arabs” (20) but does not mention his ethnicity or its relevance to his views. Chelouche was a member of Ha-Magen (The Shield), a group of Arabized Palestinian Sephardim that, in the years before World War I, promoted an alternative plan for a “shared homeland” for Palestinian Jews and non-Jews alike. On Chelouche, see Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche, *Parshat hayay* (1870–1930) (Tel Aviv: Hotsa’at Bavel, 2005).
- 26 See the following works in Hebrew: Hever, Shenhav, and Motsafi-Heler, eds., *Mizrahim be-yisra’el*; Yigal Shvarts, *Ma she-ro’im mi-kan: sugyot ba-historyografya shel ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadashah* (The View from Here: Issues in Modern Hebrew Literary Historiography) (Or Yehudah: Dvir, 2005); Hever, *Ha-sipur ve-ha-le’om*; and Yitzhak Laor, *Anu kotvim otakh moledet: masot ‘al sifrut yisra’elit* (We Write You, Homeland: Essays on Israeli Literature; English title, *Narratives with no Natives*) ([Tel Aviv]: Ha-kibuts ha-me’uhad, 1995).
- 27 See Laor, “‘Mihu Ashkenazi?’: Ḥor be-idyologia shel A.B.Yehoshu’a” (Who Is an Ashkenazi? A Hole in A. B. Yehoshua’s Ideology) in *Anu kotvim otakh moledet*, 105–14.
- 28 *Ma she-ro’im mi-kan*, 18–19.
- 29 Nancy Berg, *More and More Equal: The Literary Works of Sami Michael* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005), 2.

- 30 See *Ha-sipur ve-ha-le'om*, chapter three, "Yitzhak Shami: etniyut ke-konflikt bilti patur," 61-76. The chapter also appeared in English as Hever, "Yitzhak Shami: Ethnicity as an Unresolved Conflict," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 124-39. My quotation is taken from the English version, 125. Ammiel Alcalay sees Shami and Burla as marginalized figures who found a voice as "authentic Orientals," enacting a kind of self-Orientalism, depicting worlds they themselves had left behind; see *After Jews and Arabs*, 207-13. On Shami and Burla, see Yosef Halevi, "Mi-ha-sipur ha-'amami le-sipur omanuti," *Pe'amim* 26 (1986): 75-76. For a historically situated, biographical study of Shami, see also Salim Tamari, "Ishaq al-Shami and the Predicament of the Arab Jew in Palestine," *Jerusalem Quarterly File* 21 (August 2004): 10-26 and idem, chapter nine, "Ishaq Shami and the Predicament of the Arab Jew in Palestine," in *Mountain against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), 150-66.
- 31 On Shababo, see Yosef Halevy, *Bat ha-mizrah ha-'hadashah: 'al yetsirata shel Shoshanah Shababo* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1996).
- 32 This issue has been extensively documented by Ella Shohat, Meir Gal, Sami Shalom Chetrit, and many others. See Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 1-35 and idem, "Columbus, Palestine, and Arab Jews: Toward a Relational Approach to Identity," in *Taboo Memories: Diasporic Voices* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 201-32. For a related microanalysis of Israeli discourse on culture, see Lital Levy, "The 'Whirling Dervish' vs. the 'Universal': Discourses of Culture and Power in Israel," *Arab Studies Journal* 9/10, nos. 1-2 (Fall 2001/Spring 2002): 10-30.
- 33 Snir, "'Forget Baghdad!' The Clash of Literary Narratives among Iraqi-Jews in Israel," 161.
- 34 I have found only one explicit attempt to link Mizrahi culture in Israel to Arab Jewish culture pre-1948. In their introduction to Inbal Perlson's book *Simḥah gdolah ha-lila: muzikah yehudit-'aravit ve-zehut mizrahit* (A Great Joy Tonight: Arab-Jewish Music and Mizrahi Identity) (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006), which they title "Keysad hafkhu ha-Yehudim ha-'Aravim' li-'mizrahim?" (How Did the Arab Jews Turn into "Mizrahim?"), 7-18, Hever and Shenhav discuss the experience of Arab Jewish musicians and singers in Israel and the emergence of the Mizrahi music industry. Their discussion, however, addresses the process of transformation briefly and only as it pertains to the cultural field of music. As they put it:

Orientalism—which sought to fight the “Levantine spirit” and “safeguard the cultural level of the *yishuv*”—turned the Arab Jewish musicians into nearly anonymous entities. In the 1980s this option [of Arab Jewish identity] was already obsolete and the Arab Jews became “Mizraḥim,” a vague and simplistic category of identity invented in Israel. It signaled the entry of Arab Jews into a single large human bloc that was a function of Zionism and was also included under its umbrella [i.e., the invented category of “Mizraḥim” did not differentiate between Jews from North Africa or the Levant, etc.]. (10)

A few pages later, they provide a list of Hebrew-language works on Mizraḥim published through 2006; in their view, Perelson’s contribution to this discourse is that she “delineates the cultural hegemony responsible for the uprooting of Arab Jewish identity and for its imprisonment within a blurry, hybrid identity structure called ‘mizraḥiyut’ and that she explains how the mechanism of Orientalism operated on them” (13). What this “Arab Jewish identity” consisted of is not explained. Similarly, in a 2002 article about and interview with Shim’on Ballas, Hever and Yehuda Shenhav revive the question of the early years of the “Mizraḥi problem” in Israel but do not ask about his life (intellectual or otherwise) in Iraq. The question of early influences arises only in passing, when they remark that the perspective that informed the writing of his first novel, *Ha-ma’abarab* (The Transit Camp; 1964) is reminiscent of Lukács; Ballas responds that he read Lukács in Baghdad both in French and in Arabic translation (298). At the end of the interview, recalling his days in the Communist Party in Israel, Ballas himself notes: “From my earliest days in Israel, I was amazed to realize just how foreign and unfamiliar the Arab world was not just to the man in the street but to the class of intellectuals and party leaders” (302). Called on by party leaders who lacked basic knowledge of neighboring countries such as Syria, he ended up a commentator or analyst of Arab affairs for the communist mouthpiece *Kol ha-‘am* (The People’s Voice). See Hanan Hever and Yehuda Shenhav, “Shim’on Ballas, kolonializm ve-mizraḥiyut bi-yisrael” (“Shim’on Ballas: Colonialism and Mizraḥiness in Israel”), *Te’oryah u-vikoret* 20 (Spring 2002): 289–302.

- 35 See Gershon Shaked, *Ha-sifrut ha-‘ivrit, 1880–1980*, vol. 4: *Bi-bevley ha-zman: ha-riyalizm ha-yisra’eli, 1938–1980* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz ha-me’uḥad, 1993), 167. Shaked begins his analysis of contemporary Mizraḥi writing with the following judgment: “At times their writing sounds like the protest literature of children who overcame the injustice inflicted upon their parents and themselves”

(“Yetsiratam nishme‘a le-‘itim ke-sifrut meḥa’ah shel yeladim she-nitbagru ‘al ha-‘avel she-ne‘asah le-avoteyhem ve-la-hem be-yaldutam”; 166). His examples of this group include Ballas’s *Ha-ma‘abarah* (The Transit Camp; 1964); Sami Michael’s *Shavim ve-shavim yoter* (Equal and More Equal; 1974); Amnon Shamosh’s *Mishel ‘Ezra Safrab u-vanav* (Michel Ezra Safrab and His Sons; 1978), and Yitshak Gormezano’s *Kayits aleksandroni* (Alexandrian Summer; 1978), as well as unspecified “Ashkenazi immigrant writers.” This introduction then segues into a discussion of the four Mizraḥi works listed above. Earlier, Shaked writes that “the late ‘realists’ from the Oriental communities [bney ‘edot ha-mizrah] (and especially Shimon Ballas) did not only not accept the [Zionist] meta-narrative but implicitly identified (as did other writers from the new populations) with its opponents” (16). Indeed, Shaked’s every mention of Ballas in the book relates only to his oppositional stance to the Israeli establishment/normative Zionist positions; see also 35–36, 87, 96, 139, 166–68. For a particularly trenchant criticism of Shaked’s pronouncements on Mizraḥi writers, see Yerach Gover, *Zionism: The Limits of Moral Discourse in Israeli Hebrew Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 127.

- 36 See especially Hanan Hever, “Lo-banu min ha-yam: kavim le-ge’ografya sifrutit mizraḥit” (We Didn’t Come by Sea: Outlines for a Mizraḥi Literary Geography), *Te’oriyah u-vikoret* 16 (Spring 2000): 181–95. The article was anthologized in two printed volumes, *Mizraḥim be-yisra’el: ‘iyun bikorti meḥudash* (Mizraḥim in Israel: A New Critical Study), eds. Hanan Hever, Yehuda Shenhav, and Penina Motsafi-Heler (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Van Leer Institute and Ha-kibuts ha-me’uḥad, 2002), 191–211, and Hever, *El ha-ḥof ha-mekuveh: ha-yam ba-tarbut ha-‘ivrit u-va-sifrut ha-‘ivrit ha-modernit* (Toward the Longed-for Shore: The Sea in Modern Hebrew Literature and Culture) (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute and Ha-kibuts ha-me’uḥad, 2007), 157–77. It was also reprinted in English as Hanan Hever, “We Have Not Arrived from the Sea: A Mizraḥi Literary Geography,” *Social Identities* 10, no. 1 (2004): 31–51.
- 37 See Dror Mish’ani, *Be-khol ha-‘inyan ha-mizraḥi yesh eze absurd: ḥofa’at ha-mizraḥiyut ba-sifrut ha-‘ivrit bi-shnot ha-shmonim* (There’s Something Absurd in the Whole Mizraḥi Issue: The Emergence of Mizraḥiness in Hebrew Literature of the 1980s; titled in English *The Emergence of ‘mizraḥiyut’ in the Hebrew Literature of the Eighties*) (Tel Aviv: Am ‘oved, 2006) and Batya Shimony, *‘Al saf ha-ge’ulah. Sipur ha-ma‘abarab: dor rishon ve-sbeni* (On the Threshold of Redemption: The Story of the *Ma‘abarab*: First and Second Generations) (Or Yehuda: Dvir, Merkaz Heksherim, 2008).

- 38 In her book *Exile from Exile: Israeli Writers from Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), Berg was the first scholar to attempt to read the Hebrew works of Iraqi Jewish authors against the background of literary production in Iraq. However, the question of linkages between Iraqi Jewish writing in Iraq and in Israel takes up a relatively small part of the study, which focuses on Iraqi Jewish writing (in both Arabic and Hebrew) produced in Israel. For a summary of the contributions of Jewish writers to the development of modern Iraqi Arabic fiction, see chapter three, “Jewish Writers of Modern Iraqi Fiction,” in *ibid.*, 29–39. In her monograph on Sami Michael, Berg also briefly notes that “[t]he Arabic and Judeo-Arabic worlds of many contemporary writers (and readers) cannot be ignored as a contributing influence on their work. The linguistic situation in which these authors write has both similarities to that of their European (“Western”) predecessors and peers and distinct differences” (2; repeated on 45). See Berg, *More and More Equal*.
- 39 Gil Z. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- 40 On the polysystem, see Itamar Even-Zohar, “Polysystem Theory,” *Poetics Today* 1, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1979): 287–310. For more on the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish, see writings by Chana Kronfeld, Yael Chaver, Ken Frieden, Benjamin Harshav, Naomi Seidman, and Dan Miron, especially Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- 41 Hutcheon and Valdés, *Rethinking Literary History*, 3.
- 42 Certainly, one of the central hindrances of this proposed revision, at least as concerns pedagogy and scholarship in North America and Europe, is the dearth of translations of primary sources by Mizrahi and Arab Jewish writers from the Hebrew and Arabic—although this, too, is at least as much an effect as a cause of the underlying problem.
- 43 Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs*, 23.
- 44 See *Ha-Dover* (Baghdad, 1863–71), ed. Barukh Moshe Mizrahi; Esther Azhari Moyal, *Ta’rikh hayat imil zula* (The Biography of Émile Zola; Cairo: Maṭba’at al-tawfiq, 1903); and Shim’on Moyal, *al-Talmud: ašluhu wa-tasalsuluhu wa-adabuhu* (The Talmud: Its Origin and Its Morals) (Cairo: Maṭba’at al-‘arab, 1909).
- 45 These examples are elaborated upon in my dissertation, “Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863–1914” (U.C.

- Berkeley, 2007). See also Ammiel Alcalay, "Intellectual Life," in *The Jews of the Middle East in Modern Times*, eds. Michael Laskier, Reeva Simon, and Sara Reguer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 85–112.
- 46 Shmuel Moreh puts the number of Hebrew-character books at more than 400 and of Arabic-character books at 166; see Moreh, ed., *Al-Qiṣṣa al-qaṣira 'inda yahud al-'iraq* (Short Stories by Jewish Writers from Iraq) (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1981), 14. See also Avraham Ben-Ya'akov, *Yehudey bavel mi-sof tekufat ha-ge'onim 'ad yameynu* (The Jews of Babylon from the Late Geonic Period to the Present) (Jerusalem: Kiriat Sefer, 1979), 313; and Avraham Ya'ari, *Ha-dfus ha-'ivri be-artsot ha-mizrah* (Hebrew Printing in the East), Vol. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ha-ḥevrah le-hotso'at sfarim 'al yad ha-universitah ha-'ivrit, 1936–1940). In this index, Ya'ari catalogues all Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic books published in Baghdad.
- 47 See Yitzḥak Avishur, "Sidud ma'arakhot sifrutiyot u-tmurot leshoniyot be-kerev yehudey 'irak ba-'et ha-ḥadashah (1750–1950)" (Change and Transformation in the Language and Literature of Iraqi Jews in Modern Times, 1750–1950), *Mikedem u-mi-yam* 6 (1995): 235–54.
- 48 Alcalay, "Intellectual Life," 91.
- 49 For more on the Judeo-Spanish press, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004); on Judeo-Arabic newspapers in India, see Yitzḥak Avishur, "Sifrut ve-'itona'ut ba-'aravit yehudit shel yehudey bavel be-dfusey hodu" (Judeo-Arabic literature and journalism of Babylonian Jewry in Indian presses), *Pe'amim* 52 (1992): 101–15.
- 50 Esther Benbassa, "The Process of Modernization of Eastern Sephardi Communities," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 89–98, 92.
- 51 Avishur, "Sidud ma'arakhot," 243.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 243, and "Sifrut ve-'itona'ut," 109; Lev Hakak, *Nitsaney ha-yetsirah ha-'ivrit ha-ḥadashah be-bavel* (The Budding of Modern Hebrew Creativity in Babylon) (Or Yehudah: Merkaz moreshet yahadut bavel, ha-makhon le-ḥeker yahadut bavel, 2003), 14. Sue's novel was also translated into Judeo-Arabic in Tunisia by Semaḥ Levi from the Hebrew translation by Kalman Schulman; see Josef Chetrit, "Moderniyut le'umit 'ivrit mul moderniyut tsarfati: ha-haskalah ha-'ivrit bi-tsfon-afrika be-sof ha-me'a ha-yud-tet" (Hebrew National Modernity vs.

- French Modernity: the Hebrew Haskalah in North Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century), *Mi-kedem u-mi-yam* 3 (1990): 11-78, 18.
- 53 For more on *Ha-Dover*, see Hakak, *Nitsaney ha-yetsirah*, 271-76, and Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East," 325-38.
- 54 Unfortunately, we do not have access to the story in its entirety, as the beginning and ending appear in issues that are now lost. Extant issues containing segments of this story include no. 2 (April 1870), no. 6 or 7 (number is blurred, June 1870), no. 8 (June-July 1870), and no. 9 (July 1870).
- 55 Mizrahi asserts that the story is a faithful copy of an original Ashkenazi manuscript. See *Ha-Dover*, no. 9 (July 1870).
- 56 Cf. "Alilat dam bi-zman ha-melekh Alfonso mi-sfarad," in Solomon ibn Verga, *Shevet Yehudah* (Jerusalem: Ha-Sifriyah ha-sfaradit, 1992), 35-41. On the concept of "rewriting," see Olga Borovaya, "The Serialized Novel as Rewriting: The Case of Ladino Belles Lettres," in *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 30-68. Borovaya calls for the development of the "concept of the Ladino novel as an autonomous genre" in which translations are often rewritings and the distinction between author and translator is obscured (*ibid.*, 33).
- 57 For example, Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin define the Haskalah's temporal and spatial boundaries as follows: "It encompasses over 120 years (from around the 1770s to the 1890s), and a large number of Jewish communities, from London in the west, to Copenhagen in the north, to Vilna and St. Petersburg in the east." See Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin, *New Perspectives on the Haskalah* (London and Portland, Ore.: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 1.
- 58 For elaboration, see Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East," 286-87.
- 59 On literary circulation, see David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), esp. introduction and Part One.
- 60 See Itamar Even-Zohar, "Polysystem Theory," *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 9-26. It should be noted, however, that Even-Zohar's own writings on the Hebrew-Yiddish polysystem have been critiqued for implying a linear model of twin development that eventually merges into a single Hebrew strand. Rather than advocating a continuous linear development, my model of global Haskalah is characterized by multiple and partial, simultaneous and overlapping forms of circulation.
- 61 For more on the polysystem in the European context, see Benjamin Harshav,

- Language in Time of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), especially chapter six, "The New Cultural Trends," 24-32 and chapter seven, "The Secular Polysystem," 33-39.
- 62 From the root *n-b-d*, *nabda*; literally, to "get up," "stand up," or "rise."
- 63 See Lev Hakak, *Igarot ha-rav Shelomo Bekhor Hūşin* (The Collected Essays of Rabbi Shlomo Bekhor Hūşin) (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibuts ha-me'uḥad, 2005).
- 64 Yosef Halevi, "Ha-meshamrim hevley shav . . . megamot maskiliyot ba-sifrut ha-'ivrit ba-mizrah ha-muslemi: 'iyun be-'emek ha-shedim' (1885) le-R. S. M. Mani" (Those Who Preserve False Beliefs: Maskilic Trends in the Hebrew Literature of the Muslim East: A Study of "Emek ha-Shedim" [1885] of Rabbi S. M. Mani), in *Mehkarey Yerushalayim be-sifruyot 'am Yisrael*, ed. Efraim Ḥazan (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1984), 33-60, and Galya Yardeni, ed., *Sal ha-avanim: sipurim erets-yisra'eliyim bi-tekufat ha-'aliyah ha-rishonah* (The Basket of Stones: *Eretz Yisra'eli* Stories from the First *'Aliyah*) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1967), 46-53.
- 65 See especially Avraham Ben-Ya'akov, *Shirah u-fiyut shel yehudey bavel ba-dorot ha-aharonim: osef ve-mivḥar* (Hebrew Poetry of Baghdadi Jewry: Collected and Selected Poems) (Jerusalem: Ben Tsvi Institute, 1970).
- 66 See, for instance, Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 33; Stillman refers to Şanu' as a "unique phenomenon." Şanu', an Egyptian Jew who became a leading political journalist and who created the Egyptian theater, was not unique, but it is true that he is the only Jewish writer of real consequence for the history of modern Arabic letters. His famous (1877) satirical journal *Abu Naddara*, "Mr. Spectacles," was widely read even after he was exiled to Paris in 1878, and the text had to be smuggled into Egypt. While Şanu' presented himself first and foremost as an Egyptian patriot rather than as a Jew, he never denied his Jewish identity.
- 67 For elaboration, see my dissertation, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East," chapters two and three. See also Shmuel Moreh and Philip Sadgrove, *Jewish Contributions to Nineteenth-Century Arabic Theater: Plays from Algeria and Syria, a Study and Texts*, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 6 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), especially chapter one, "The Jewish *Nabḏa* (Renaissance) in the Middle East," 17-31.
- 68 For example, in the last chapter of his authoritative work *The Jews of Islam*, which he calls "The End of the Tradition," Bernard Lewis presents the viewpoint that Eastern Jewish communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were

- largely cut off from external developments. See *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 154–91.
- 69 Murad Farag, *Diwan Murad* (4 vols.) (Cairo: 1912, 1924, 1929, 1935). Vol. 1: Maṭba‘at Kuhin wa-Ibrahim Ruzintal, 1912; Vol. 2: Maṭba‘at al-I‘timad, 1924; Vol. 3: al- Maṭba‘a al-raḥmaniyya, 1929; Vol. 4: al Maṭba‘a al-raḥmaniyya (all published in Cairo); idem, *Ha-kodshiyot* (Holy Offerings) (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Şamwil Raḥamin Ashir [Shmuel Raḥamin Asher], 1928).
- 70 See Brad Sabin Hill, “Hebrew Printing in Baghdad,” *Report of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies* (2003–2004): 53–77.
- 71 The poet and scholar Dahud Sliman Şemaḥ (David Tsemaḥ) typified this type of intellectual. See Lital Levy, “From Baghdad to Bialik with Love: A Reappropriation of Modern Hebrew Poetry, 1933,” in *Comparative Literature Studies* 42, no. 3 (2005): 125–54.
- 72 This may sound paradoxical, but remember that Iraq was under British rule, so integration into the larger society also entailed exposure to Britain, especially as many Jews came to fill white-collar positions in the mandatory administration.
- 73 Cf. Orit Bashkin, “Al-Miṣbāḥ (1924–1929)—A Jewish Iraqi Newspaper” (in Hebrew). M.A. Thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1998; and idem, “The Lamp, Qasim Amin, Jewish Women, and Baghdadi Men: A Reading in the Jewish Iraqi Journal *Al-Miṣbah*” (unpublished paper for Ninth Mediterranean Research Meeting, Montecatini Terme, Italy, 12–15 March 2008). See also Snir, *Araviyut, yabadut, Tsiyonut*, 23–47.
- 74 Modern Hebrew language instruction in Baghdadi Jewish schools began with the arrival of Rabbi Moshe Ventura of Istanbul, a graduate of his city’s rabbinical college. Ventura came to Baghdad as a rabbi in the Ottoman army; he remained in the city after its capture by the British. At the invitation of the *ḥakham bashi* (chief rabbi), he took charge of the pedagogy of the local *beyt midrash* and instituted a new, modern method of Hebrew study, “*ivrit be-‘ivrit*” (Hebrew [taught] in Hebrew), for which he published a four-part series of instructional books. The first teachers of modern Hebrew in Baghdad, who arrived in 1917, were pupils of the Istanbul rabbinical college who had studied the method; they were followed beginning in 1925 by certified teachers from Palestine who promoted Zionism and Hebrew nationalism, until the Iraqi authorities curtailed their activities in 1935. The teachers dispatched from the Yishuv consciously set out to transform their pupils’ perspective of Hebrew from a religious to a national language, a mission which they admit they met with difficulty. See Shaul

- Shayik, "Morim erets-yisra'eliyim be-'irak (1925-1935): moked le-ḥinukh 'ivri le'umi" (Palestinian Hebrew Teachers in Iraq: A Focal Point for National Hebrew Education), *Yahadut Bavel: Ktav-'et le-ḥeker toldot yehudey bavel ve-tarbutam* (Babylonian Jewry: A Journal for the Study of the History of Babylonian Jews and their Culture) 2 (1998): 141-60.
- 75 Ḥiyya is identified by historian Nissim Kazzaz as a young police officer. Shina (1899-1978), a lawyer, was the group's cofounder and its secretary. See Nissim Kazzaz, *Ha-yehudim be-'irak ba-me'a ha-'esrim* (The Jews of Iraq in the Twentieth Century) (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1991), 50-51.
- 76 *Yeshurun* 1 (8 Kislev/19 November 1920): 1. On *Yeshurun*, see also Hakak, *Nitsaney ha-yetsirah ha-'ivrit ha-ḥadashah be-bavel*, 277-96.
- 77 Ben-Ya'akov, *Shirah u-fiyut*, 387.
- 78 See, for instance, Isaiah 47, all of which is addressed to *bat bavel* (sometimes referred to as *betulat bat bavel*), and Jeremiah 50-51, esp. 50:41 and 51:33.
- 79 George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: H. Hamilton, 1938).
- 80 Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi (1863-1936), was a prominent Iraqi poet, philosopher, and educator, remembered in particular for his defense of women's rights.
- 81 Hakak, *Nitsaney ha-yetsirah*, 159.
- 82 Ben Ya'akov, *Yehudey bavel*, 302. By 1947, even the Bible itself was taught in Jewish schools in Arabic translation, from a reader translated and abridged by 'Ezra Ḥaddad.
- 83 Snir, "Arabs of the Mosaic Faith," 160-61. For more on Sami Michael's experience of this process, see Berg, *More and More Equal*, 46-48.
- 84 E.g., 'Amir, *Tarnigol kaporot* (Rooster of Atonement) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 1983); idem, *Scapegoat*, trans. Dalya Bilu (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988); idem, *Mafriah ha-yonim* (The Pigeoneer) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 1992); idem, *Yasmin* (Jasmine) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 2005); Michael, *Viktoryah*; idem, *Mayim noshkim le-mayim* (Water Kissing Water) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 2001); idem, *Yonim be-trafalgar* (Pigeons in Trafalgar Square) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 2008). For discussions of 'Amir and Michael's adoption of the Zionist perspective, see Snir, "Arabs of the Mosaic Faith," 163-69 and Berg, *More and More Equal*, 111, 151. Similarly, Ella Shohat observes that *Viktoryah* "describes the young heroine's life in Iraq from the turn of the century until the 1950s, after which she reenters the

- narrative as an elderly woman in present-day Israel. The event surrounding her dislocation, as well as the novelistic description of her move from Iraq to Israel, forms a textual silence in which the move to Israel is a taken-for-granted, obvious, and transparent act in the heroine's life." See "Rupture and Return" in Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, 330-58; quotation from 338.
- 85 E.g., Dorit Rabinyan, *Simtat ha-shkediyot be-omerjan* (The Alley of Almond Trees in Omerjian) (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 1995); in English, *Persian Brides*, trans. Yael Lotan (New York: George Braziller, 1998). The novel, which was a bestseller in Israel, offers a highly Orientalized portrayal of Jewish life in Iran. In a 1985 interview, Michael states that he is "not writing about the reality in Iraq for the Iraqi reader, but for the Israeli reader, that these chapters of the past are a part of [the Israeli], and I mediate them for him." Alex Zehavi, "Lignov et ha-'ivrit" ("To Steal Hebrew"), *Yediyot ahronot*, 15 February 1985, cited in Berg, *More and More Equal*, 3 (Berg's translation).
- 86 See, for instance, Ballas, *Solo and Ve-hu aher/Outcast* (see n. 13 above); see also Sami Michael, *A'idab* (Or Yehuda: Kineret/ Zmorah Bitan, 2008). On this point, see also Alcalay, "Foreword," *Keys to the Garden*, and "Introduction," *After Jews and Arabs*, 10-11.
- 87 On Naqqash, see Lital Levy, "Exchanging Words: Thematisations of Translation in Arabic Writing from Israel," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 23, nos. 1-2 (2003), 106-27. See also Neri Livneh, "Ha-mikre ha-muzar shel ha-sofer ha-'iraki be-Petaḥ Tikvah" (The Strange Case of the Iraqi Writer in Petaḥ Tikvah), *Haaretz* (weekend supplement), 6 August 2004.
- 88 Interview with Shimon Ballas, Tel Aviv, 12 June 2008.
- 89 See also Reuven Snir, "Arabs of the Mosaic Faith," 161.
- 90 Interview with Sami Michael, Haifa, 16 June 2008.
- 91 See Snir, "Arabs of the Mosaic Faith," 164-65.
- 92 Berg, *More and More Equal*, 6-7.