

## ARTÍCULOS

### The Love of Religion or the Religion of Love? Revisiting the *Ġazal* of Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl

¿El amor por la religión o la religión del amor?  
Revisando el *Ġazal* de Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl

Rachel Friedman

University of Calgary

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2956-3320>

#### Abstract

The Andalusī poet Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl (609/1212-649/1251), who converted from Judaism to Islam, wrote poems in the sub-genre of love poetry known as *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* about objects of affection named Mūsā and, less frequently, Muḥammad. Scholarship on Ibn Sahl has typically focused on the question of whether the historical Ibn Sahl’s conversion to Islam was sincere or not, reading his poetry for clues about his true religious identity and beliefs. More specifically, readers have wondered whether his poems about Mūsā indicate a yearning for Judaism. This article problematizes this question with attention to what is known of the historical circumstances in which Ibn Sahl lived and through critical discussion of the phenomenon of conversion. It then redirects the conversation about Ibn Sahl’s poetry: rather than trying to understand the sincerity of Ibn Sahl’s conversion through his poetry, this article reads his poems as literary texts, with attention to their wordplay, imagery, and intertextuality. Analysis of Ibn Sahl’s poetry that pays close attention to this significant intertextuality illuminates the network of religious references in it and the ways in which they function within the poetry. The conclusion, following from close reading of select poems from Ibn Sahl’s *dīwān*, is that the merit of these poems, and the characteristics that have made them compelling to audiences, stems from the ways in which they maintain the possibility of different interpretations, thus continually stoking the audiences’ curiosity, as well as their marvel-inducing usage figurative language, intertextuality, and wordplay.

**Key words:** poetry; *ġazal*; Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl; intertextuality; Qur’ān; Mūsāwīyyāt.

#### Resumen

El poeta andalusí Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl (609/1212-649/1251), que se convirtió del judaísmo al islam, escribió poemas pertenecientes al subgénero de la poesía amorosa conocida como *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* sobre los amados Moisés, y con menor frecuencia Mahoma. Las investigaciones sobre Ibn Sahl se han centrado, tradicionalmente, en la cuestión acerca de si la conversión histórica al islam fue sincera o si sus poemas sobre Moisés reflejan un anhelo oculto por el judaísmo. Este artículo problematiza esta cuestión, prestando atención a lo que se sabe de las circunstancias históricas en las que vivió Ibn Sahl y por medio de una discusión crítica del fenómeno de la conversión. Luego redirijo la conversación sobre la poesía de Ibn Sahl: en lugar de tratar de comprender la sinceridad de la conversión de Ibn Sahl a través de su poesía este artículo lee sus poemas como textos literarios, con atención a sus juegos de palabras, imágenes e intertextualidad. El análisis de la poesía de Ibn Sahl, que presta mucha atención a esta significativa intertextualidad, ilumina la red de referencias religiosas que hay en ella y las formas en las que funcionan dentro de la poesía. La conclusión, tras la lectura atenta de poemas seleccionados del *dīwān* de Ibn Sahl, es que el mérito de estos poemas y las características que los han hecho atractivos para el público proceden de las formas en que mantienen la posibilidad de diferentes interpretaciones, por lo que continuamente avivan la curiosidad del público, así como su uso, que induce a los portentos del lenguaje figurativo, la intertextualidad y los juegos de palabras.

**Palabras clave:** poesía; *ġazal*; Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl; intertextualidad; Corán, Mūsāwīyyāt.

*Citation / Cómo citar:* Friedman, Rachel, “The Love of Religion or the Religion of Love? Revisiting the *Ġazal* of Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl”, *Al-Qantara*, 43, 1 (2022), e03. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3989/alqantara.2022.003>.

*Received:* 28/11/2015; *Accepted:* 16/11/2021; *Published:* 05/07/2022

## Ibn Sahl: A Brief Introduction

The sub-genre of Arabic love poetry called *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* is characterized by the unrequited yearning of the lover for a beloved from a distance, causing tears and tortured longing.<sup>1</sup> The Andalusī poet Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl al-Isrā’īlī al-Isbīlī (609/1212-649/1251), who converted from Judaism to Islam, is famous for his poems in this genre, which he composed about objects of desire named Mūsā and Muḥammad. Scholarship has focused on the question of whether the historical Ibn Sahl’s conversion to Islam was sincere or not, turning to his poetry for clues and asking whether his *ġazal* about Mūsā indicates a covert yearning for, and allegiance to, Judaism. Fodder for this debate includes Ibn Sahl’s own enigmatic statement about his true affiliation: “For people what is manifest, and for God what is hidden”, said Ibn Sahl, upon being asked what his true religion was.<sup>2</sup> This answer—or coy avoidance of an answer—stoked the flames of inquisitiveness further. This article departs from previous scholarship in declining to draw a direct link between Ibn Sahl’s poetry and his own religious identity. Further, a discussion that complicates the nature of conversion leads to a reconsideration of how meaningful the question of the poet’s sincerity in converting is at all. Rather than trying to understand the historical Ibn Sahl’s inner psychology or historical conversion through his poetry, this article reads his poems as rich literary texts. More specifically, Ibn Sahl’s poetry plays skillfully with the conventions of *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* and Qur’ānic phrases and references to create masterful verse. While this poetry creates tantalizing meanings that express longing that is sometimes framed in terms imbued with religious allegory and scriptural intertextuality, I maintain, it does not provide access to a resolution to the vexed question of Ibn Sahl’s own identity. This article, therefore, reframes the question of the poet’s sincerity and then redirects attention from the question of his conversion to the literary qualities of his poetry, with specific attention to the ways he uses Qur’ānic intertextuality as well as wordplay, imagery, and figurative language to compelling and marvelous effect.

Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl al-Isbīlī al-Isrā’īlī was born in 609/1212 to a prosperous Jew-

ish family living in Seville, which was at the time under Almohad rule. He became known as a clever and talented poet at an early age, and he earned a living by composing *madh* (panegyric poetry) to wealthy patrons and local rulers. Textual sources (discussed below) record that Ibn Sahl converted from Judaism to Islam at some point during his life; the historical record does not mention when that occurred. In 646/1248, when Seville was captured by the Christian king Fernando III of Castile, Ibn Sahl fled to Ceuta (on the coast of the Maghreb) and became secretary to the Almohad governor Abū ‘Alī ibn Ḥallās. When Ibn Ḥallās sent his son to deliver a message to the Hafsid caliph Muḥammad al-Mustanṣir I in Ifrīqiya (now Tunisia), Ibn Sahl accompanied him on the journey by sea. Their ship was destroyed in a storm, however, and all aboard perished.<sup>3</sup> It is apparent that Ibn Sahl was well-regarded during his day; his poetry is reported to have been widely known in the Maghreb, and when he drowned, his death was lamented with the phrase: “The pearl has returned to its home”.<sup>4</sup>

## The Debate over the Sincerity of Ibn Sahl’s Conversion

The sincerity of Ibn Sahl’s conversion has long been the focus of dispute and speculation. Ibn Sahl’s own poetry and his reported statement (cited above) have been fodder for conjecture on this topic.<sup>5</sup> This issue has been at the forefront of the reception of Ibn Sahl and his poetry, during his lifetime as well as in later medieval and modern scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Some reports from his peers claim he only pretended to be Muslim, while others say he died a true Muslim.<sup>7</sup> As a poet who was famous for his *ġazal* and his *mu-wašṣahāt*, Ibn Sahl has short sections devoted to him in the major Arabo-Islamic compendia of history and biobibliographical dictionaries of the centuries that followed, and his poetry has also been the subject of a few pre-modern and modern monographs. The short sections of compendia devoted to Ibn Sahl tend to recount similar elements: Ibn Sahl’s brief biography, men-

<sup>3</sup> Al-Ifrānī, *Al-Maslak al-sahl*, pp. 67-68. On a dispute regarding the year of Ibn Sahl’s death, see Soualah, *Ibrahim b. Sahl*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-tīb*, vol. 3, p. 523.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ifrānī, *Al-Maslak al-sahl*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>6</sup> See Soualah, *Ibrahim b. Sahl*, pp. 167-170.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Ifrānī, *Al-Maslak al-sahl*, p. 67.

<sup>1</sup> On *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* see Hamori, “Love Poetry (*Ghazal*)”, pp. 205-206.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-tīb*, vol. 3, p. 523.

tion of his reputation as a learned and smart poet, some prominent lines of his poetry (including two especially famous lines around which the argument for Ibn Sahl's sincere conversion often coalesces, to be discussed below), and pronouncements of what scholars have concluded about the sincerity of his conversion. However, each of several major sources includes some interesting variations on the details. For this reason, it is worth taking a brief look at what some of these sources have to say about Ibn Sahl. His inclusion in major historical and biographical texts of the several centuries following his death is a testament to his firm inclusion in the canon of Arabic poets. The details of what is reported about him provide a glimpse into the circulation of information about him and the lines of his poetry seen as most noteworthy.

The Mamluk historian Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) records in his biographical dictionary *Al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafayāt* what Ibn al-Abbār said of Ibn Sahl. Ibn al-Abbār (d. 658/1260) was a contemporary of Ibn Sahl, who, like him, was born in al-Andalus and tolerated some political tumult during the Reconquista, eventually emigrating to Tunisia (in 635/1249) where he worked as a secretary of the Hafsid court in Ifrīqiya. On Ibn al-Abbār's authority, al-Ṣafadī recounts the tale of Ibn Sahl's perishing and Ibn al-Ḥallās' bereavement following it. Al-Ṣafadī also quotes Aḫr al-Dīn Abū Ḥayyān (al-Ġarnāfi) as saying Ibn Sahl's full name was Ibn Sahl al-Iṣbīlī al-Islāmī and that he composed a *qaṣīda* eulogizing the Islamic prophet Muḥammad *before* he converted to Islam.<sup>8</sup>

A few centuries later, the Maghrebi scholar al-Maqqarī (d. 1041/1632), in his famous compendium of Andalusī history *Nafḥ al-tīb*, includes a short sub-section on Ibn Sahl in a section on Jewish poets (*al-ṣu'arā' al-yahūd*). He records both conflicting views on the sincerity of Ibn Sahl's conversion and quotes another scholar (Abū al-Ḥasan b. Sim'at) as saying: "Two things are not sound: Ibn Sahl's conversion to Islam and al-Zamaḥsharī's renunciation of Mu'tazilism".<sup>9</sup> He also recounts: "Some Maghrebis were asked why Ibn Sahl's composition was so refined; they said: because in him, two kinds of submissiveness (*ḡullayn*)

were joined: the submissiveness of desire and the submissiveness of Judaism".<sup>10</sup> This answer can be interpreted to refer to the status of Jews living under Muslim rule and the status of the *'udrī* lover who is subjugated (or subjugates himself) in his desire for the beloved. It also implies a perceived link between Ibn Sahl's own life circumstances, identity, and the contents of his poetry.

Al-Maqqarī and the Ottoman polymath known as Kâtip Çelebi (d. 1068/1657) both appear to suggest that Ibn Sahl composed *madḥ* (praise) poetry to the Islamic prophet Muḥammad *after* his conversion.<sup>11</sup> Kâtip Çelebi writes that the two beloveds mentioned in Ibn Sahl's *ḡazal* were two boys; he also specifies that in North Africa Ibn Sahl was considered to have died a Muslim, with the contents of his poetry cited as proof, while in al-Andalus he was considered to have died in a state of *kufr* (infidelity).<sup>12</sup>

The Moroccan scholar Muḥammad al-Ifrānī (d. c. 1156/1743) states that Ibn Sahl's poetry was a locus of speculation about his true religious allegiance.<sup>13</sup> Some scholars, he recounts, pointed to the content of particular lines of poetry to support their view that his conversion was sincere; al-Ifrānī himself considered Ibn Sahl's conversion to have been sound. He lists the views of several other scholars on the matter, some on each side of the argument. Of note is one in Ceuta who affirmed that Ibn Sahl was a true Muslim, using as evidence Ibn Sahl's outward behavior (e.g. attending prayers).<sup>14</sup> In introducing Ibn Sahl's love poetry about Mūsà, al-Ifrānī writes that this Mūsà may have been a person Ibn Sahl knew in Seville or elsewhere, or he may be the prophet (Moses).<sup>15</sup> Recent scholarship has similarly doubted the sincerity of Ibn Sahl's conversion, also based on transmitted reports and the content of his poetry, sometimes pointing to a report according to which Ibn Sahl recanted his Islam shortly before his death.<sup>16</sup>

The poetry that these scholars puzzle over and cite in debating Ibn Sahl's true religious belief is almost all Arabic-language poetry. How-

<sup>10</sup> Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-tīb*, vol. 3, p. 523.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-tīb*, vol. 3, p. 526; Kâtip Çelebi, *Kaṣf al-zunūn*, vol. 2, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Kâtip Çelebi, *Kaṣf al-zunūn*, vol. 2, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Ifrānī, *Al-Maslak al-sahl*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Ifrānī, *Al-Maslak al-sahl*, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Ifrānī, *Al-Maslak al-sahl*, p. 74.

<sup>16</sup> See Lowin, *Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems*, p. 41, fn. 115; see also Schippers, "Humorous Approach of the Divine", p. 135, fn. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafayāt*, vol. 6, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> The latter reference is to the renowned 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century scholar known by the nickname *Jār Allāh*. For more on al-Zamaḥsharī and his Mu'tazilite views, see Ibrahim, "Az-Zamaḥsharī", pp. 95-110.

ever, a Hebrew-language *baqqaša* —a Jewish liturgical poem of supplication— has also been ascribed to Ibn Sahl. It too has garnered attention that has largely been focused on seeking clues to Ibn Sahl’s true religious identity. This attention has focalized around one striking line in it: “From the enormity of our troubles, we despaired of our deliverance/We left our religion, we were trembling”.<sup>17</sup> Complaining of feeling abandoned by God is conventional in this liturgical genre, but going so far as to claim having forsaken one’s religion is surprising and unusual, leading Yosef Tobi to conclude that if our Ibn Sahl is indeed the prayer’s author, “the question of his conversion is resolved”.<sup>18</sup> However, reading the poem as a literary expression rather than a literal confession of the historical Ibn Sahl’s own inner belief results in a different conclusion —that the poet-persona expresses intense yearning and even torment at living in a state of exile and awaiting the community’s redemption as foretold in Scripture. Such a reading frames the line cited above as perhaps pushing the boundaries of this genre of *piyyut* but not being a testament to its author’s own personal state.<sup>19</sup>

### Conversion Under Almohad Rule

The circumstances and occasion of Ibn Sahl’s conversion to Islam have not been preserved, but some historical context on conversions under Almohad rule in general may help to envision the general milieu in which his conversion took place. On the topic of religious conversion under Almohad rule broadly speaking, there has been a range of scholarly views, from the claim that forced conversions had “little impact” to the idea that their impact was significant, including on Muslims (who may have had to convert to the Almohad doctrine); thus, there is still much yet to be fully understood about conversion under the Almohads.<sup>20</sup> What *is* known about the conditions of Jews under Almohad rule in general, though, provides important historical background. In a stark break with previous Islamic dynasties, Almohad policy abolished the *dhimmī* status, forcing the conversion or expulsion of

Jews in Almohad-controlled lands.<sup>21</sup> There is evidence, however, that policies that had been stringently applied in the early years of Almohad rule were subsequently toned down and revisited later in Almohad times.<sup>22</sup>

An interesting report from an Almohad historian sheds some light on the complex position inhabited by Jews who converted to Islam in Almohad lands. Under the rule of the third Almohad caliph, Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr (r. 580/1184-595/1198), people who had been newly converted from Judaism to Islam had to wear special distinguishing garments. The Almohad historian ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Marrākuṣī (d. 647/1250) explained that “what moved the caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb to mark externally the converted Jews were his doubts about their sincerity”.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, al-Marrākuṣī reports that Jews in his day proclaimed Islam [*yuzhirūn al-Islām*], prayed in mosques, and taught their children the Qur’ān, but “[only] God knows what is hidden in their hearts and what their homes contain [*Allāhu a‘lam bi-mā tukinnu ṣudūruhum wa-taḥwīhi buyūtuhum*].”<sup>24</sup>

However, although converted people were sometimes seen not to be fully Muslim, the “Almohads seem to have felt satisfied with certain external reassurances regarding their subjects’ adherence to true belief”.<sup>25</sup> Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130) was in favor of seeing converted people’s behavior as signs of their faith and sought to promote positive narratives of converted people.<sup>26</sup> Some have explained the resulting situation on the ground in terms of a tacit agreement to keep up the act in order to placate the rulers.<sup>27</sup> Maurus Reinkowski also alludes to the complexity of religious conversion in this context, explaining the “crypto” convert as one who “continues to secretly adhere to his original religion, whether in a rather unconscious continuation of religious practices or in the form

<sup>17</sup> See Tobi, “Appendix Three”, pp. 364-374.

<sup>18</sup> Tobi, “Appendix Three”, p. 371.

<sup>19</sup> I have made this argument elsewhere. See Friedman, “Scriptural Intertextuality”.

<sup>20</sup> Fierro, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, pp. 111-112.

<sup>21</sup> Fierro, “Conversion, ancestry and universal religion”, p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> Fierro, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, p. 116.

<sup>23</sup> Fierro, “Conversion, ancestry and universal religion”, p. 160.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Marrākuṣī, *Kitāb al-Mu‘ǧib*, p. 224.

<sup>25</sup> Fierro, “Conversion, ancestry and universal religion”, p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> Fierro, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> Reinkowski, “Hidden Believers, Hidden Apostates”, p. 417.

of a conscious loyalty to the familiar religion”.<sup>28</sup> This conception of different levels of adherence and allegiance suggests that the sincerity of one’s conversion may not be considered an “all or nothing” question.

Before turning to consider this point further, is important to address a key practical question about Ibn Sahl himself. If Almohad policy dictated abolishment of *ḍimmīs* as a category, how is it that he lived as a Jew, before his conversion, under Almohad rule? Further, Ibn Sahl was born into a well-established Jewish family in Seville, which had been under Almohad rule since the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and was indeed the Almohad capital in al-Andalus. It is apparent, then, that his family had not been forced to convert to Islam, and the available sources on Ibn Sahl do not state that his conversion was coerced. Relatively few Jewish sources from this setting mention forced conversions in general, and as Alan Verskin has discussed, these texts’ treatment of the issue is somewhat ambiguous.<sup>29</sup> There are some historical accounts that mention other examples of Jews living under Almohad rule (including at least one other prominent poet); further study is needed before these can be more fully understood in terms of a broader portrait of Jewish existence under the Almohads.<sup>30</sup> For our purposes here, suffice it to say that it does not seem that Ibn Sahl’s upbringing as a Jew in Almohad lands was an individual exception. It is also worth noting that during the Reconquista, when some Muslims converted to Christianity,<sup>31</sup> he did not do so, instead fleeing to Ceuta.

### Complicating the Question of Conversion

Much of the past discussion of Ibn Sahl has speculated about his conversion’s sincerity, appealing to his poetry for answers. This article seeks to reorient the discussion, away from the poetry as source of historical answers about Ibn Sahl’s own convictions and allegiance, and toward a literary analysis of the poetry itself. The above discussion has provided an idea of what is known about religious conversion under Almohad rule, but taking a closer look at conversion

as a phenomenon complicates and ultimately undermines the idea that there could ever *be* a straightforward answer to the question of Ibn Sahl’s conversion (even one that is not available through his poetry).

Indeed, the view of the converted person becomes complex when we consider that it is culturally situated, bound up with beliefs about identity and selfhood that are implicated in the way a given culture views the dynamics of conversion.<sup>32</sup> Religious conversion is a contested term that can be construed as an event or a process, a communal or individual experience, a spiritual or a social one.<sup>33</sup> Naomi Seidman has written about the complexities of conversion and identity among Jews and Christians in medieval Europe, noting that conversion could be “less an accomplished transformation than a continually rehearsed and repeated performance”.<sup>34</sup> In a discussion of religious rituals and specifically conversion rituals, Seidman also points out that “pious submission to the mimetic rules of religious adherence cannot be easily distinguished from the feigning, or ‘dress rehearsal’, of such adherence”.<sup>35</sup> An observer cannot differentiate participation in religious ritual that is based in heartfelt belief from participation that reflects no such inner conviction; sincerity cannot be determined from watching another person’s actions (or, in this case, reading his poetry). Texts in particular can be sites of hidden meanings that are visible only to specific audiences.

Those who converted sometimes occupied special roles in society. A person who had converted in medieval Europe could serve as a go-between, translating between Hebrew and European languages. Some translations produced by those who had converted from Judaism to Christianity, especially under duress, show how their translators used cleverly encoded Hebrew linguistic play to produce texts with double meanings —one apparent meaning available to all (including non-Jewish readers) and the other, obscured meaning available only to Jewish audiences, as Seidman has shown.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in a discussion about converts, Yirmiyahu Yovel has written about how *conversos* historically used literary writings to encode meanings that only the initiated

<sup>28</sup> Reinkowski, “Hidden Believers, Hidden Apostates”, p. 413.

<sup>29</sup> Verskin, “Medieval Jewish Perspectives”, p. 155.

<sup>30</sup> Fierro, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Fierro, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, pp. 125-126.

<sup>32</sup> Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, p. 144.

<sup>33</sup> García-Arenal & Glazer-Eytan, “Introduction”, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, pp. 144-150.

could appreciate, thereby privileging particular linguistic sensibilities.<sup>37</sup>

The suggestion of a variety of ways of living in relation to the pre- and post-conversion religions, bringing into view more complex and culturally situated ways of understanding conversion, suggests a new approach to the vexed question that has perennially been tied to Ibn Sahl and his poetry. Avoiding the assumption that an answer can be derived from analysis of Ibn Sahl's poetry, the poetry he composed and the famous quotation attributed to him ("For people what is manifest, and for God what is hidden") can perhaps tell us something different. Given that Ibn Sahl's own words fueled and provoked speculation about the sincerity of his conversion, beginning during his own lifetime, it does not seem that Ibn Sahl's priority was to stanch speculation about this topic. If he had wanted to put to rest all questions of a lingering allegiance to Judaism, he could have done so by answering the question of his true religion in a more straightforward manner. What we know of Ibn Sahl's sayings and poetry does not suggest the situation of a person who felt duress or fear at the possibility of being perceived an incomplete or insincere convert. On the contrary, pronouncements and poems that openly stoke the flames of curiosity and inquisitiveness about his religious allegiance seem to embrace the role of a figure whose identity is ambiguous and unclear. This raises the question of whether Ibn Sahl purposely positioned himself as someone who could afford to have his faith continually questioned. If so, this anecdotal evidence can be brought to bear on knowledge of conversion under Almohad rule, though many elements of the larger picture remain incomplete.

Furthermore, Ibn Sahl's poetry includes quotations from the Qur'an (an issue that will be discussed further below), and this too does not seem to have resulted in any repercussions for his stature or safety.<sup>38</sup> Quoting the Qur'an in poetry has historically been seen by some (particularly in the Sunni orthodoxy) to be inappropriate and unacceptable, but again based on the historical record that attests to Ibn Sahl's poetry being well known and well regarded among the

political elites in Almohad society, it does not seem that Ibn Sahl's concern was with adhering strictly to a safe, conservative path in poetic expression, and there is no indication that he was excoriated for his poetry's Qur'anic references. The medieval scholarship reviewed above does not mention widespread reactions of this sort to Ibn Sahl's poetry; a couple of classical sources do so but do not indicate popular or political rebuke of Ibn Sahl for this.<sup>39</sup> One source that mentions this issue is a treatise entitled *Lahn al-'awwām fīmā yata'allaq bi-'ilm al-kalām* by Abū 'Alī 'Umar al-Sakūnī (d. 717/1317) on correcting commoners' mistaken religious beliefs.<sup>40</sup> This treatise of his contains a section on referencing and quoting (directly or in a modified form) *ayāt* from the Qur'an in poetry, which he says is forbidden among Sunnis, and it identifies Ibn Sahl as one of several poets who engaged this practice.<sup>41</sup> Given the broader context of Ibn Sahl's reception (and the subject of al-Sakūnī's book), it is likely that al-Sakūnī's attitudes were not representative of his society's general sensibilities. Indeed, although there was some disapproval of including Scriptural intertextuality in poetry among religious scholars—both from the Muslim and Jewish sides—Andalusi poets still did include such intertextuality in both Arabic and Hebrew poetry abundantly and in meaningful ways, as Shari Lowin has shown.<sup>42</sup>

In light of this discussion, let us return to Ibn Sahl's answer upon being asked his true religious identity. His clever quip, "For people is what is manifest, and for God is what is hidden", avoided a direct reply to the question of what his true religion was, but this response stoked the inquisitiveness of his audiences—as could be expected from coy and indirect phrasing of this kind. Taking a closer look at the phrase, which Ibn Sahl uttered in a rhymed Arabic formulation (*li-l-nās mā zahara, wa-li-llāh mā istatarā*), it clearly echoes two Biblical verses.<sup>43</sup> This interlingual inter-

<sup>37</sup> Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, vol. 1, pp. 128-152.

<sup>38</sup> The relationship between poetry and the Qur'an is a large topic beyond the scope of this article. For an introduction to this subject, see Boullata, "Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'an," and Abu Zayd, "Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an".

<sup>39</sup> Al-Ifrānī mentions that Ibn Sahl's quotation of the Qur'an falls into the category of the forbidden because it was in jest (*al-hazl*). However, this does not impede al-Ifrānī from recounting the widespread praise of Ibn Sahl and his poetry. Al-Ifrānī, *al-Maslak al-Sahli*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Sakūnī had also lived in Seville and the Maghreb under Almohad rule; he was known as a Mālikī jurist, legal theorist, and scholar of language. "Qirā'a fī maḍmūn *Lahn al-'awwām*".

<sup>41</sup> Al-Sakūnī, *Lahn al-'awwām fīmā yata'allaq bi-'ilm al-kalām*, cited in "Qirā'a fī maḍmūn *Lahn al-'awwām*".

<sup>42</sup> Lowin, *Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems*.

<sup>43</sup> The biblical verses are quoted here in the JPS 1917 Edition translation:

textuality displays Ibn Sahl's adept way with words and ability to play skillfully with elements of Arabic style and Biblical intertexts. It also brings to mind discussions of hidden meanings in Jewish literary texts and translations. The Biblical allusion in Ibn Sahl's formulation can be seen as a hidden reference of this kind, recognizable only to (educated Jewish) audiences who had deep familiarity with the Bible. Perhaps to Muslim audiences, the phrase would instead have brought to mind the sentiment expressed by al-Marrākuṣī —the suspicion of the private practices and beliefs of the general population of Jews who converted to Islam, despite public adherence to Islamic practices.

Returning to the larger concept of conversion, the question of sincerity is only one way of asking the question of what Seidman has termed “the efficacy of conversion”. A person's emotions and allegiances may shift over time, but on a broader level, having Jewish ancestry and a Jewish bloodline were still sometimes seen as salient in Islamic settings.<sup>44</sup> No level of personal belief can change ancestry. The issue of whether religious identity was a matter of ethnicity or personal belief has been a live question in many contexts that further complicates the question of conversion. Moreover, anthropological approaches to understanding religious conversion have contributed the insight that judging a conversion in terms of sincerity and authenticity is a specific, culturally conditioned way of doing so.<sup>45</sup> Some recent scholarship has had the goal of redirecting discussions of religious conversion from being oriented around sincerity and a convert's “true” identity to instead “historicize the very categories of will and compulsion, and to analyze the process through which coercion was legitimized by, or reconciled with, a conception of faith”.<sup>46</sup> This article, following from this shift, similarly aims to move away from the question of sincerity and “true” identity in discussing Ibn Sahl, instead turning attention to reading his poetry itself.

Proverbs 25:2: “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter”.

Deuteronomy 29:28: “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law”.

<sup>44</sup> Fierro, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, p. 121.

<sup>45</sup> García-Arenal & Glazer-Eytan, “Introduction”, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> García-Arenal & Glazer-Eytan, “Introduction”, p. 15.

It should be also noted that if we approach the question of a poet's sincerity from a poetic perspective, here too it is impossible to draw a direct and simple line between the poetic speech of Ibn Sahl and his “inner” (*bāṭin*) truth. It is important to recognize the relationship between poet and speaker, and between poetry and convention: Ibn Sahl has composed poetry within particular genres (e.g., *ġazal*), and in the interaction between convention and innovation, the poet distinguishes his work. Expression is mediated through following and playing with conventions of a poetic genre.<sup>47</sup> Although the tradition may sometimes not differentiate between the poet and the speaker in a poetic text, it is important to take into account aspects such as convention, performativity, and genre, at minimum, when considering the relationship between poet and speaker; not every composer of *ḥamriyyāt* drank wine.

#### *Al-ġazal al-ʿudrī* in Ibn Sahl's *dīwān*

It has become clear that searching Ibn Sahl's poetry for a straightforward answer to the question of his “true” religion is a vexed goal, but Ibn Sahl's poetry is worthy of study in its own right, with the aim of understanding the dynamics of this poetry as literary text. Ibn Sahl's *dīwān* is comprised largely of *al-ġazal al-ʿudrī*, with poems ranging from short fragments of two or three lines to longer ones of 15 lines or more. Praise poetry (*madḥ*) to local rulers, wine-poems (*ḥamriyyāt*), and *muwašṣahāt* are also present in the *dīwān*. Here, attention will be focused on Ibn Sahl's innovations in *al-ġazal al-ʿudrī*, a type of poetry that expresses unrequited love and yearning. Before turning to Ibn Sahl's poetry itself, a brief overview of *al-ġazal al-ʿudrī* will be beneficial.

The composition of *al-ġazal al-ʿudrī* dates back to at least the Umayyad era, when the *qitʿa* (poetic fragment) was developing in various genres. The name may derive from the word “virginal” (*ʿudrī*) or from the Banū ʿUdra tribe, whose members excelled in composing in this genre.<sup>48</sup> Typical of *al-ġazal al-ʿudrī* is a singular and overpowering desire for the beloved. Because of the precise type of religiously-laden

<sup>47</sup> On the relationship between genre, convention, and expression, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, “Arabic Lyrical Phenomenon”.

<sup>48</sup> Afsaruddin, “Arabic-Islamic Literature: Continuities and Transformations”, p. 174. See also Jacobi, “Time and Reality in ‘Nasīb’ and ‘Ghazal’”, pp. 1-17.

intertextuality that Ibn Sahl embeds in his poetry, it is worth giving a special mention to the relationship between religious longing and that expressed in *al-ġazal al-‘udrī*. Andras Hamori has pointed out that *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* “usually keeps latent” the incompatibility of obsession with a human beloved and devotion to God.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, “it is easy to see how such annexation of the language of Islam might imply an obsession so absolute as to leave no room for religion at all”.<sup>50</sup> Viewed from another perspective, the singular feeling of devotion to the beloved makes religious imagery a fitting form of expression: in *al-ġazal al-‘udrī*, “love is often expressed in religious terms: the beloved is the object of the lover’s devotion, the shrine to which he makes his pilgrimage”.<sup>51</sup> Some Sufi poets also drew on the conventions of *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* to express their union for yearning with the divine.<sup>52</sup> By the Andalusi period, Arabic-language poets had a range of ways of inscribing religion in their verse, some of which were devotional and others provocative and daring.

Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl’s *ġazal* constitutes an example of poetry that mixes talk of the sacred with the language of human-centered love in a complex configuration of allusions. Although many of his *ġazal* poems do not name the beloved, it is not infrequent to see Mūsā mentioned, and occasionally Muḥammad, as the beloved. Given the presence of these names and what is known of Ibn Sahl’s life story, it comes as no surprise that the object of the poet-persona’s desire has stoked discussion of whether Ibn Sahl used this poetry to express his feelings toward Islam and Judaism, using metonymic references to Muḥammad and Mūsā to do so. There has long been critical speculation about the identity of these two figures: while some identify them as historical individuals known to Ibn Sahl, others interpret them as being symbolic of Judaism and Islam respectively. Interpreters who have taken the latter approach see them as expressing an intense and unresolved longing for Judaism, the religion of Mūsā, and of Islam as manifested in poems of love for Muḥammad. The association between *al-ġazal al-‘udrī* and secrecy adds to the intrigue

of Ibn Sahl’s use of this genre.<sup>53</sup> Ibn Sahl’s poetry uses a system of metaphors based in religious discourse rooted in Scriptural narratives in order to portray the nature and intensity of the lover’s feelings toward his beloved. It interweaves the discourse of tortured desire for a beloved with religious references, a move familiar, in very different guise, from Sufi poetry.

The *Mūsāwiyyāt*, as the *ġazal* poems about Mūsā have sometimes been called, are unique to Ibn Sahl.<sup>54</sup> In tone and in imagery, they generally follow the established generic conventions of *al-ġazal al-‘udrī*: imagery typically revolves around conveying sadness and pain due to the separation from the beloved and the reproach of those who blame the speaker for desiring his beloved. The most common setting mentioned in these poems is the nighttime, and the poet-persona speaks of lying awake in a state of pained yearning, thinking of his distant beloved. Other topoi include tears, loneliness, desirous glances, and guilt. The speaker is a martyr to love, and his fate in love is tragic. There is a range of poetic styles in the *dīwān*, but in many senses the following poem can be taken as broadly representative of some themes and features of Ibn Sahl’s verse:<sup>55</sup>

ظُلماً خَصَمْتَ شَهِيدَ الْحَبِّ عَنْ دَمِهِ      وَذَلِكَ خُذُّكَ مَصْبُوباً بِعَنْدَمِهِ  
يَصْبُوبُ لِالْحَاطِظِ مُوسَى الْقَلْبِ وَاعْجَبَا      رَامَ غِزَا مُقْتَلْتِي صَبَّ بِأَسْهَمِهِ  
نَصِيبُ عَاشِقِهِ مِنْ خُبِّهِ نَصَبٌ      وَحِظٌ مُغْرَمِهِ إِرْجَاءُ مُغْرَمِهِ  
عَلِمْتُهُ الْفَتَاكُ فِي قَلْبِي بِنَاطِرِهِ      لَوْ يَقْبَلُ الْوَصْلَ رَأْيَا مِنْ مُعَلِّمِهِ  
*Unjustly, you deprived love’s martyr of his blood,  
and that is your cheek colored by its red dye  
The heart inclines in desire toward the glances of  
Mūsā, how astonishing! a marksman shooting  
an arrow at my flowing eye  
The fate of his lover, due to loving him, is hardship,  
and the luck of his admirer is deferral of his debt  
I taught him to slay my heart with his glance – I  
wish he would accept the tryst as a proposal  
from his teacher*

It is clear why Ibn Sahl was known as the “Abū Nuwās of al-Andalus”: not only did he compose poems expressing desire for male beloveds, but his poetry is also manneristic in style; it is replete with *taġnīs*, wordplay based on different meanings of words from the same linguis-

<sup>49</sup> Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> Meisami, “Ghazal”, pp. 249-250. Cf. Sells, “Love”, pp. 126-158.

<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, Cornell, “Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah”; Safi, “al-Hallaj”; ‘Aṭwī, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ*; ‘Arār, “Muqaddimat al-Mu‘allif”; Homerin, “Living Love”.

<sup>53</sup> On this aspect of *al-ġazal al-‘udrī*, see Khan, “On the Significance of Secrecy in the Medieval Arabic Romances”, pp. 238-253.

<sup>54</sup> Schippers, “Humorous Approach of the Divine in the Poetry of al-Andalus: The Case of Ibn Sahl”, pp. 119-138.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Sahl, *Dīwān Ibn Sahl al-Andalusī*, p. 196. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.



tic root. In this poem, for instance, the third line contains two different words from the root *n-ṣ-b* (*naṣīb* and *naṣab*) as well as two words from the root *ḡ-r-m* (*muḡrim* and *maḡram*). In addition, the first line of the poem contains wordplay in the phrases ‘*an damihi* and ‘*andamihi*. As well, there are instances of figurative language (such as the stock metaphor of the cruel beloved slaying with arrows). Poetry in this style, packed with such literary devices, has been known as *badī’* (innovative). Historically, while some audiences have entertained by the dazzling show of skill and creativity required to create such poetry, others have considered this style of poetry to be artificial or distracting in that it is “stuffed” with literary devices that detract from, or even edge out, the conveying of excellent meanings.<sup>56</sup>

There are many instances where Ibn Sahl depicts his beloved as having particular physical characteristics, though the overall range of physical description is limited. Scholarship has normatively described *al-ḡazal al-‘udrī* as not focusing on the physical, but Jokha Alharthi has demonstrated that this presumption is false, and that the body is represented in various ways in the tradition of ‘*udrī* poetry.<sup>57</sup> In some lines of Ibn Sahl’s poetry, a beauty mark or mole on Mūsā’s cheek is admired, as in this typical short *Mūsāwiyya*:<sup>58</sup>

كَانَ الْخَالُ فِي وَجَنَاتِ مُوسَى سَوَادُ الْعَثْبِ فِي نُورِ الْوَدَادِ  
وَحَطَّ بِصَدْغِهِ الْحُسْنَ وَأَوَّأَ فَتَقَطَّ خَذَهُ بَعْضُ الْمِدَادِ  
لَوَاحِظُهُ مُحَيَّرَةٌ وَلَكِنْ بِهَا اهْتَدَتْ الشُّجُونُ إِلَى فَوَادِي  
It is as if the beauty mark on Mūsā’s cheeks is the  
blackness of blame in the glow of love  
Beauty drew a “wāw” on his temple, and some of  
the ink dotted his cheek  
His eyes are confounding, but because of them  
sadness found the way to my heart.

This simultaneous attraction and sadness is characteristic of *al-ḡazal al-‘udrī*, along with the idea of blame: it is conventional for such poetry to mention blame and blamers, those who cajole the speaker to moderation and to leave behind the obsession with the beloved.<sup>59</sup> The speaker is reproached for such unacceptable and hopeless lovesickness. Here, it seems the beauty mark on the beloved’s luminous face (a com-

mon element of the *Mūsāwiyyāt*) is a reminder or metaphor for this blame, a black spot within the “glow of love”.

Another important element that characterizes this *ḡazal* is Scriptural intertextuality. Some poems include lines that draw on the Qur’ān, both in diction and in narrative, as an important intertext. Many of these references are to Qur’ānic narratives about Moses, Joseph, and other Israelite prophets. Previous scholarship has identified the presence of this intertextuality in Ibn Sahl’s poetry, so rather than identifying and cataloguing its locations throughout Ibn Sahl’s *dīwān*, attention here will focus on a close reading of the precise nature of the intertextual references and the way they function in particular poems—that is, the approach here is that of a reading that is close rather than expansive, with an emphasis on examining the ways in which Qur’ānic intertexts are mobilized in the meanings created in the poems.<sup>60</sup>

I will begin with a two-line fragment that is Ibn Sahl’s most cited poetry in the anthologies and biobibliographical literature. Reference to Qur’ānic ideas figures prominently in this, Ibn Sahl’s most famous *qiṭ‘a*:

تَسْلِيْتُ عَنْ مُوسَى بِحُبِّ مُحَمَّدٍ هُدَيْتُ، وَلَوْلَا اللَّهُ مَا كُنْتُ أَهْتَدِي  
وَمَا عَنْ قَلْبِي قَدْ كَانَ ذَلِكَ وَإِنَّمَا شَرِيْعَةُ مُوسَى عَطَلَتْ بِمُحَمَّدٍ  
I took solace from Mūsā in loving Muḥammad; I  
was guided, and if not for God I would not  
have been guided  
And that was not due to distaste, but the šarī‘a of  
Mūsā was nullified by Muḥammad

These two lines contain language familiar to love poetry and religious discourse intertwined. Taking a closer look at the diction, the first line contains two striking and notable verbs, *tasallaytu* and *hudītu*. The first one, *tasallā*, has a range of meanings that includes “to delight, take pleasure in”, “to console, find comfort in”, and “to seek distraction and diversion” (in something from something else). This Form V (*tafa‘ala*) verb can also be understood as a reflexive, intransitive form of the root’s Form II (*fa‘ala*) transitive verb meaning “to make someone forget” (something), “to distract, divert”, and “to comfort, console”.<sup>61</sup> Thus, within the diction of the *qiṭ‘a*, the verb could indicate

<sup>56</sup> Heinrichs, “Maṭbū‘ and Maṣnū‘”, in *Routledge Encyclopedia*, p. 516.

<sup>57</sup> Alharthi, *The Body in Arabic Love Poetry*.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn Sahl, *Dīwān ibn Sahl al-Isrā‘īlī*, p. 118.

<sup>59</sup> Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, p. 40; see also Alharthi, *The Body in Arabic Love Poetry*, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> See Schippers, “Humorous Approach” and Soualah, *Ibrahim b. Sahl* for the identification of many instances of Qur’ānic intertextuality.

<sup>61</sup> See Alshdaifat, “Formation of Verbs of Emotion in Arabic”, pp. 111-114.

that the speaker was delighted or distracted by the love of Muḥammad, leading him to neglect and turn away from Moses. This reading would then make of Muḥammad a new beloved. Another possibility complicates this first one. Reading *tasallaytu* as “be consoled”, the line suggests that Muḥammad comforts and consoles the speaker, a bereaved lover whose ordinary desire and love for Moses has not been eliminated but can at best be assuaged through distraction and solace. This interplay of two meanings creates an unresolved ambiguity. Muḥammad is a distraction and/or a consolation, in both senses a replacement of attention to Mūsà. Turning to the second significant verb, the poet uses the root *h-d-y* twice (*hudītu*, *ahtadī*), in both cases signifying that the speaker has been guided. This root is significant in Qur’ānic diction, frequently used to describe the divine activity of guiding people to the right path. Notably, it is also associated with Moses and other Israelite prophets in Qur’ānic usage, and the Qur’ān uses this root to remind the audience that God gave Moses a *kitāb* that guides.<sup>62</sup> In the first line of this *qit’ā*, too, it is God who guides the speaker.

The second line of the *qit’ā* offers no resolution but continues the ambiguous play of diction and meaning. *Al-qilā* signifies distaste and forsaking. The noun is negated, and the use of the demonstrative *dākā* (“that”) suggests something remote, possibly also in temporal terms. The passive verb *’uṭīllat* has a few related usages: to be nullified, discontinued, or made null and void, and in Qur’ānic usage, to be abandoned or neglected.<sup>63</sup> If this verse is taken to refer to human beloveds, one beloved distracts the speaker from the other, rendering the love of the first one null and void—no longer in force. If the line is taken to be about Judaism and Islam, expressed in metonymic terms, the speaker has turned from Judaism to Islam because the latter superseded, abrogated, or nullified the former. The term *ṣarī’at Mūsà* can be understood as the Law of Moses or the way of Moses, referring metonymically to Judaism as a way and as a legal system. It is possible to interpret the poem as working on two interrelated levels. The speaker’s attention and allegiance is drawn from one beloved to another, which supersedes the first

desire. Thus, the *Mūsāwiyyāt* are expressions of yearning, but they allow for a double reading of this yearning as religious-allegorical and *ghazal*-literal, maintaining both possibilities and closing off neither one.

Reading the *Mūsāwiyyāt* more broadly, it becomes clear that they do not all reflect a singular attitude toward Mūsà. It is conventional to arrange poetic *dīwāns* alphabetically by end-rhyme, resulting in a largely synchronistic reading experience of the poetry. There are occasional notes on the moment at which a poem was composed and recited that may provide a sense of chronological trajectory in Ibn Sahl’s *dīwān*; these notes are mostly on his panegyric poetry. Thus, one hesitates to try to chronologize the *Mūsāwiyyāt* and rather stops short at noting that there is a range of sentiments toward Mūsà. There is often admiration and yearning for him as a beloved, but at other times the speaker expresses sentiments renouncing his love for Mūsà and repenting of it. For instance, one *qit’ā* (“*us ‘id al-waḡd bi-dam ‘in*”) ends with the following two lines:<sup>64</sup>

لستُ مشغوفاً بموسى! إنه ليس لي قلب فأشكو الشغفا  
كنت أشكو في الهوى، واليوم قد تبت. يعفو الله عما سلفاً!  
*I am not in love with Mūsà! I don’t have a heart,  
so I complain of heartfelt love  
I used to complain in love, and today I have  
repented. May God forgive what preceded!*

Thus, it is important to keep in mind that the *Mūsāwiyyāt* do not have one single attitude or message where Mūsà is concerned.<sup>65</sup> However, there is stylistic consistency: here as in the first poem quoted above, there are examples of wordplay such as *taḡnīs* (root-based wordplay) and conceptual *badī’*: the word *ṣaḡaf* denotes heartfelt love in the literal sense of love reaching to the pericardium (*ṣaḡāf* and *ṣaḡaf* also denote the pericardium itself). This skillful play of word and meaning imbues the *Mūsāwiyyāt* with a particular aesthetic feel.

The constellation of religious references in the *Mūsāwiyyāt* extends beyond Moses and Muḥammad to include allusions to other

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Q 2:53, Q 6:84, Q 6:91, and Q 6:154.

<sup>63</sup> The root appears twice in the Qur’ān, both times in Form II derivations: Q 22:45 mentions an abandoned well (*bi’r mu’atṭala*), and Q 81:4 mentions neglected camels being abandoned (*al-‘iṣār ‘uṭṭilat*).

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Sahl, *Dīwān*, p. 244. Because classical Arabic poems are conventionally referred to by their first few words rather than an independent title, I will provide the first few words of poems that I do not quote in full, in order to provide a clear way of later referring back to particular poems.

<sup>65</sup> Schippers saw Ibn Sahl as merely teasing Mūsà by feigning desire for a new beloved. Schippers, “Humorous Approach”, p. 128.

Qur'ānic figures. Take, for instance, the following verses, which are in the middle of an 18-line *ġazal* (“*naẓarun jarā qalbī*”).<sup>66</sup>

موسى تَنبَأَ بِالْجَمَالِ، وَإِنَّمَا هَارُوتُ لَا هَارُونَ مِنْ أَنْصَارِهِ  
 إِنْ قُلْتُ فِيهِ: هُوَ الْكَلِيمُ، فَخَدُّهُ يُهْدِيكَ مُعْجِزَةَ الْخَلِيلِ بِنَارِهِ  
*Mūsà prophesied with beauty, but Hārūt, not Hārūn, is among his supporters*  
 If I say about him: he is the Interlocutor, then his cheek guides you to the miracle of the Friend with his fire

These lines are built upon specific Qur'ānic allusions (*talmīḥāt*). In a play on words, the first hemistich can mean that Moses prophesied beautifully, or that he prophesied beauty. The association of Moses with beauty is common to both Jewish and Muslim tradition.<sup>67</sup> The two figures mentioned in the second hemistich are Moses' brother Aaron (*Hārūn*) and one of the two “fallen” angels (*Hārūt* and *Mārūt*) mentioned in *Sūrat al-Baqara*.<sup>68</sup> Aaron, the brother and companion of Moses, is seen in a negative light from the point of view of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, because of his participation in building the Golden Calf. In more general terms, he was the brother and companion of Moses who is replaced here. *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, mentioned only in one enigmatic verse of the Qur'ān, were angels at Babylon apparently meant to test the people's wills to resist occult magic. They appear in a section of *Sūrat al-Baqara* that admonishes the Jews of Medina for believing in sorcery, saying “we are a temptation” (*innamā nahnu fitna*).<sup>69</sup> Later exegetical tradition adds the following explanation of how the angels came to earth:

The sight of men's sins had impelled the angels to make derogatory remarks about mankind. When God challenged them to do better if placed under the same conditions, they accepted a test, for which *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were chosen. Having come down to the earth with instructions to avoid the

grave sins of idolatry, fornication, murder and the drinking of wine, they almost immediately were captivated by a wondrously beautiful woman. Being caught unawares at the very moment when she was granting them her favours, they killed the man who had witnessed their misconduct. God caused them to be watched while doing so by their brothers who had remained in heaven, and who consequently could only say “Indeed Thou wast right”.<sup>70</sup>

Again the theme of forbidden temptation has emerged, and these lines even seem to suggest that Moses together with *Hārūt* was also a test of the ability to resist that which would deter from the right path. Moses is called the Interlocutor [of God] (*al-kalīm/kalīm Allāh*) in Muslim tradition, because of his role in transmitting Divine guidance to the Children of Israel in the desert,<sup>71</sup> and here he guides to the Friend (*al-ḥalīl*), who is Abraham, miraculously saved “from the fire into which his heathen compatriots had thrown him”.<sup>72</sup> According to the Qur'ānic narrative, God declared (in Q 21:73): “O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham”, thus keeping him from harm. It is also noteworthy in this context that *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* were punished for their hypocritical sins by eternally hanging upside-down in a pit of fire.<sup>73</sup> Both *Hārūt* in the exegetical lore and *Hārūn* in the Qur'ān were punished for succumbing to temptation. The temptation alluded to here plays on another valence of the term “fire”. While for Abraham and *Hārūt* it was intended to cause physical harm, in *ġazal* poetry fire often symbolizes the heat of desire. In these lines of poetry, Ibn Sahl has cleverly interwoven references to the conventional imagery of *ġazal* and Qur'ānic characters (and perhaps also later exegetical tradition).

The theological connections that Ibn Sahl interweaves so skillfully are thus tied up in an aesthetics of longing, where attraction and beauty are associated with Moses, whose cheek guides the audience to Abraham's fire miracle. Ibn Sahl again uses the cheek imagery here, thereby tying together the human *Mūsà* and the Biblical one. It is now the cheek that guides (using the same religiously connotative verb *yuhdī*) to the miracle of the cool fire. If Ibn Sahl's verses evoke a saving escape from the potential pain and harm of fire, their sentiment leads back to the tortured and conflicted longing that Ibn Sahl's poetry

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Sahl, *Dīwān*, p. 155.

<sup>67</sup> This idea is connected with Ex. 2:2, in which the word *toḅ* is sometimes interpreted to mean “beautiful” or “lovely”. Shana Strauch Schick discusses these interpretations in a forthcoming article. Schick, “Behind Every Great Prophet”, p. 37, fn. 31. The idea of Moses' beauty also appears in the Christian tradition. See Calaway, *The Christian Moses*, p. 77 and p. 294, fn. 69.

Islamic tradition has it that Moses' immense beauty was so compelling for Pharaoh's daughter that she brought him into the palace to raise. His people, the Children of Israel, were thus thought to have radiant beauty.

<sup>68</sup> Brinner, “Hārūt and Mārūt”.

<sup>69</sup> Q 2:102.

<sup>70</sup> Vajda, “Hārūt wa-Mārūt”.

<sup>71</sup> Soualah, *Ibrahim b. Sahl*, p. 85.

<sup>72</sup> Paret, “Ibrāhīm”.

<sup>73</sup> Vajda, “Hārūt wa-Mārūt”.

continually expresses. It is noteworthy that his verses direct the reader to sections of Qur'ānic discourse that depict Israelite prophets in positive terms, emphasizing how God protected them against people who wished to harm them, and constructing from these sections a poetics that redeems these Israelite prophets from within Islamic Scripture itself.

Another striking example of Ibn Sahl's religious allusions being taken specifically from the Qur'ānic account of prophetic history inserts Mūsà in place of Yūsuf, in the following lines found in a longer *nūniyya* (which begins with the phrase "*ru' bi-ğayš al-laddār*"): <sup>74</sup>

كم نهاني من حب موسى أناس عذلوني فإن بدا عذروني  
أكبروه فلم تقطع أكم بمدى بل قلوبهم بجفون  
*How much people forbade me from loving Mūsà;  
they blamed me, though when he appeared,  
they excused me*  
*They extolled him; hands were not cut by knives—  
rather, their hearts were, by eyelids*

These lines may appear enigmatic at first, particularly the second with its economy of wording (*iğāz*) and reliance on external textual reference, and so some explanation will be helpful to draw out the meaning. The lines' Qur'ānic references draw together two different narratives, those of Moses and Joseph. When Joseph arrives in Egypt and is made head of Potiphar's household, the Qur'ān relates the following:

Some women of the city said, "The governor's wife is trying to seduce her slave! Love for him consumes her heart! It is clear to us that she has gone astray". When she heard their malicious talk, she prepared a banquet and sent for them, giving each of them a knife. She said to Joseph, "Come out and show yourself to them!" and when the women saw him, they were stunned by his beauty, and cut their hands, exclaiming, "Great God! He cannot be mortal! He must be a precious angel!" <sup>75</sup>

This hand-cutting episode is not recounted in the Biblical account of Joseph, but it is present in the Qur'ān as well as post-Biblical Jewish lore. <sup>76</sup> According to this narrative, the Egyptian women first pass judgment on Potiphar's wife, but when they see Joseph himself, they change their minds because of his overwhelming attractiveness. Joseph is associated with beauty in the

Islamic tradition, as well as with "the chastity that is based on complete trust in God, for it was his absolute piety that prompted God to personally intervene to prevent him from the transgression of succumbing to sexual temptation". <sup>77</sup> Potiphar's wife Zulayḥā is also seen as less blameworthy because of Joseph's extraordinary beauty. <sup>78</sup> Ibn Sahl draws a parallel: the poem's speaker proclaims how people blamed him without understanding his attraction to Mūsà, before ultimately seeing that the desire was justified by the miraculous beauty of the beloved. In the second line, those who had previously blamed are deeply affected by the beloved to the point that they extolled him (*akbarūhu*, the same verb that is used in recounting this story in Q 12:31). Here, too, the particular Qur'ānic references in Ibn Sahl's poetry are those that redeem Israelite prophets, drawing the audience's attention to portrayals of them as exceptional, praiseworthy, and protected by the Divine.

Using mainly Islamic sources' narrative of Joseph situates Ibn Sahl's poetry within Islamic heritage and textual reception. In the lines above, the poet-persona attempts to justify his love for Mūsà by suggesting the latter is extraordinary. Such a beloved may excuse an otherwise inappropriate or blameworthy desire. Instead, the witnesses are overcome by an emotional reaction. <sup>79</sup> The Israelite prophet (Mūsà/Yūsuf), at first assumed to be a cause of blame, is suddenly revealed to be wonderful and praiseworthy. Ibn Sahl refigures his beloved as special and innocent, akin to Yūsuf, inciting a reaction of surprise. In this way, the poet draws heavily on the Qur'ānic narrative, while also interweaving the topoi of his *ğazal uḍrī*: tears, blame, admiring the beloved as having supernatural beauty. A broader reading of Ibn Sahl's *dīwān* finds that his poetry's Qur'ānic intertextuality often draws on narratives that include Israelite prophets, including Zakariyyā, Šu'ayb, and Ya'qūb, in

<sup>77</sup> Firestone, "YŪSUF b. Ya'kūb".

<sup>78</sup> Firestone, "YŪSUF b. Ya'kūb".

<sup>79</sup> Though Ibn Sahl is most clearly drawing on the Qur'ānic narrative here, it is interesting to note that the surprised reaction of the Gentile, no longer able to criticize, is a topos in Jewish tradition. One prominent example is of the biblical story of Balaam, who climbed to the top of a mountain intending to curse the Israelites, but when he viewed their settlement from atop the mountain, he was only able to exclaim: "How wonderful are your tents, oh Jacob, your dwelling places, oh Israel!" (Genesis 24:5) These moments are "magical" (or Divine) solutions to persecution, wherein the aggressor is at the last minute prevented from perpetrating any crime against the Jews.

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Sahl, *Dīwān*, p. 212.

<sup>75</sup> Qur'ān 12:30-31. Rendering of Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem*.

<sup>76</sup> See Polano, *The Talmud*, p. 80.

addition to those already mentioned.<sup>80</sup> Ibn Sahl sometimes attributes the characteristics of one of them to his beloved Mūsā, conflating them into one composite Israelite identity that is the object of desire. The important pattern is the desire of this figure, in whatever prophet's form, but through Islamic sources, particularly the Qur'ān. This is not to say that every Scriptural reference in Ibn Sahl's poetry serves to configure and portray Israelite prophets in glowing terms, but rather to point out a pattern in some such references.

Ibn Sahl's poetry also contains another type of reference to the Qur'ān. It occasionally contains Qur'ānic phrases quoted directly (*iqtibās*), which can be seen as being more theologically problematic than his drawing on the content of Qur'ānic stories of the prophets.<sup>81</sup> Beginning at the time of the Qur'ānic revelation itself, and coming to the fore in tenth-century discourse on *i'ğāz al-Qur'ān* (the inimitability of the Qur'ān), was the idea that the Qur'ānic form and wording was itself inimitable.<sup>82</sup> In particular, the Qur'ān self-referentially differentiates and distances itself from poetry, so that imitating its style and incorporating its phrasing in poetry is often seen as problematic. Nonetheless, Ibn Sahl was not the only poet to incorporate Qur'ānic phrases into his verse, as mentioned earlier. We can see an example at work in Ibn Sahl's poetry in this two-line *qit'ā'*:<sup>83</sup>

قد كتب الحُسْنُ على خَدِّهِ،      إنا فتحنا لك فتحاً مُبِين  
يا قلبُ، إنْ ملتَ إلى غيرِهِ      ما أنتَ إلا في ضلالٍ مُبِين  
*Beauty has been written on his cheek; verily we  
granted you a clear victory  
Oh heart, if you incline toward one other than  
him; what are you but in clear error*

A plain reading of the lines of poetry yields a meaning that is focused on desire for the beloved: the beloved is attractive, and the heart

would be misguided to yearn after someone else. But each of these two lines ends with a Qur'ānic phrase, evoking the voice of the divine as expressed through Scripture to the human audience, and the Qur'ānic resonance would be clear to any audience familiar with the *āyāt* that are quoted. The inclusion of Qur'ānic language could be taken in two ways: the poet could be showing off his skills in weaving these phrases into his verse while maintaining the rhyme and meter —no simple feat— without importing the broader context of the Qur'ānic phrases into the poem. The other possibility is to read the lines of poetry as importing into the poem the broader meanings of these intertextual phrases in their Qur'ānic contexts. A closer look at the two lines will shed light on the interpretations that result from doing so.

The first hemistich of the first line is a typical description of the beloved's cheek; the second hemistich consists of a verbatim quotation of Q 48:1. It is noteworthy that the next Qur'ānic verse (Q 48:2) follows it with the phrase “that God may forgive your sins (*ḍanbika*)”. Blame for wrongdoing is a theme both in *al-ğazal al-udrī* (e.g., in the stock figure of the blamer) and in discourse of insincere religious conversions. The second line of the poem also contains a Qur'ānic phrase in the second hemistich: the phrase “in clear error” is used when Abraham breaks his father's idols, condemning a form of false religion that was a distraction from true guidance toward God's path.<sup>84</sup> Thus, in both cases, considering the broader context of the *āyāt* that are quoted leads to the discovery that this context can be seen as bringing meaning to bear on the poem: the ‘clear victory’ in the first line is thus situated as being a form of forgiveness for previous wrongdoing, and inclining to a different beloved is situated as being a deviation from the rightly-guided path. Taking into account the broader context of the *āyāt* results in a more complex interpretation of the lines of poetry; two short lines contain an abundance of multilayered meaning. An audience well educated in the text of the Qur'ān who would be able to call to mind the broader context of each *āya* and make connections in content would be rewarded with the thrill of discovering deeper meaning in the lines of poetry.

<sup>80</sup> Schippers, “Humorous Approach of the Divine in the Poetry of al-Andalus”, p. 127. Schippers locates references to these figures in Ibn Sahl's poetry, though without delving into the specific significance of their particular Qur'ānic intertexts.

<sup>81</sup> See Boullata, “Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'an”, for discussion of the historical discourse surrounding human imitation of Qur'ānic style and implications of taking up such imitation.

<sup>82</sup> Scholars such as 'Abd al-Karīm al-Ḥaṭṭābī and 'Alī ibn 'Isā al-Rummānī maintained that a key component of the Qur'ān's inimitability is its rhetorical excellence (e.g., use of literary devices and eloquent diction). See their treatises entitled *Bayān i'ğāz al-Qur'ān* and *al-Nukat fī I'ğāz al-Qur'ān* respectively in *Talāt rasā'il fī i'ğāz al-Qur'ān*.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Sahl, *Dīwān*, p. 220.

<sup>84</sup> Q 21:54: “He said, ‘You and your fathers have clearly gone astray’”. Abdel Haleem, *Qur'an*.

### Interpreting Ibn Sahl's *Mūsāwīyyāt*

Ibn Sahl's poetry skillfully interweaves conventional imagery and topoi of *al-ġazal al-'udrī*, in an often-manneristic style, with different types of Scriptural intertextuality through his corpus of *Mūsāwīyyāt*. Having seen the ways in which these elements function and interact in this poetry, it is possible now to consider the overall effect of the *Mūsāwīyyāt* and the role of intertextuality within them.

We have seen that Ibn Sahl wove various types of Qur'ānic references into his poetry, and it is worth pausing to consider the significance of this intertextuality in its historical context. Andalusī poets composing verse in Hebrew and Arabic often embedded Scriptural language and allusions into their poetry; this embedding can be seen as playful at times, showing off the poet's skill and knowledge while creating intertextual linguistic riddles for the audience to solve, but it often goes beyond ornamentation to convey creatively constructed meanings within poetry.<sup>85</sup> Shari Lowin has drawn attention to a pattern in which Hebrew poems by Jewish poets embed Biblical intertextuality in ways that, she has tried to show, "subtly invert the biblical account and its traditional exegesis to intimate a new and potentially subversive exegesis", while in Arabic poems by Muslim poets, Qur'ānic allusions "elevate mundane, human love and imply that it is sacred, even redemptive".<sup>86</sup> If this dichotomy is based on religious affiliation, Ibn Sahl's poetry may bridge the divide. His allusions to Qur'ānic narratives of Israelite prophets sometimes seem to legitimize desire for the beloved by framing it in terms of that which is given approval in Scripture. For example, in "*tasallaytu 'an Mūsā*", God's guidance directs the poet-persona toward the beloved, and in "*ru' bi-ġayš al-laddāt*", the attraction to Mūsā is legitimized through its framing in Scriptural terms. The dynamics of the Scriptural allusions raise the status of the love for Mūsā by claiming it is, for instance, akin to Zulayḥā's attraction to Yūsuf. Mūsā as a signifier remains open to different readings: the love expressed in these verses may be worldly, for a human lover, and/or it may be love for Judaism personified in the figure of Mūsā. Neither possibility is closed off within the dynamics of the poetry.

At the same time, more tentatively, it seems there is a hint of subversive refiguring in this poetry as well, one that construes Mūsā as redeemed and rightly guided through the vehicle of allusions to selectively pieces of chosen Scriptural narrative. To the extent that Mūsā may be taken to signify Judaism, the poems that valorize him assert Judaism's praiseworthiness. But Ibn Sahl's *ġazal* does not only allude to *āyāt* about Mūsā; other Qur'ānic characters are enlisted in the service of praising Mūsā. Rather than nuanced exegesis of particular Scriptural verses or passages, Ibn Sahl's way of bringing together different characters and images results in a flattening or amalgamation of Scriptural references which results in innovative and striking poetic images and demonstrations of aesthetic skill. If indeed Ibn Sahl's poetry works to suggest a subversive exegesis, perhaps it is not of a particular *āya* but rather involves selective proof-texting to redeem *šarī'at Mūsā* and create a narrative of Israelite admirability through recourse to the Qur'ān. This suggestion, however, must be qualified by the *Mūsāwīyyāt*'s inconsistent attitude toward Mūsā. It does not seem that the main aim of this poetry is commentary on, or reinterpretation of, Qur'ānic verses. Still, this implication of reading Mūsā allegorically is interesting to consider.

Interweaving Scriptural references into his *ġazal* in these various ways gives Ibn Sahl's poetry its own characteristic feel. Indeed, Ibn Sahl's body of *Mūsāwīyyāt*, and his *ġazal* more generally, constitutes "*a literary artifact with a distinctive aesthetic*".<sup>87</sup> The medium of poetry allows for the maintaining of ambiguity and leaving the interpretive door open to multiple interpretations. While this abstaining from pinning down meaning may be unsuitable for some genres of text, such as those that are meant to explain and clarify (e.g., exegesis and *fiqh*), poetry tends to operate on a different set of expectations and norms. These poems are eminently "open texts" that leave room for their audiences to wonder, speculate, and construct meanings by filling in their own interpretations.<sup>88</sup> Records that speak to the reception history of this poetry indicate that Mūsā (and Muḥammad) has been interpreted as being, variously, a specific historical person, a reference to Judaism, and a

<sup>85</sup> See Lowin, *Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems*; Brann, *Compunctious Poet*, pp. 41-54.

<sup>86</sup> Tanenbaum, "Sacred and Suggestive", p. 262.

<sup>87</sup> This phrase (not used there in reference to Ibn Sahl) comes from Tanenbaum, "Sacred and Suggestive", p. 264.

<sup>88</sup> On the concept of the open text, which was developed by Umberto Eco, see Hendricks, "Open and Closed Texts".

combination of the two. As we have seen, speculation about the level(s) on which the *Mūsāwīyyāt* signify has continued to occupy readers for centuries. Thus, perhaps it is precisely *because* of their “open” nature that these texts have remained compelling to listeners and readers.

Causing audiences to examine lines and try to discover their meaning goes hand in hand with the particular style of these poems when considered in terms of the aesthetic sensibilities of the time. As we have seen, Ibn Sahl often used a highly manneristic style that made frequent use of literary devices such as wordplay, allusion, figurative language, and economy (*ṭġāz*). For many of those to whom this *badī*’-rich style of Arabic poetry appealed, the pleasure and delight of the experience of poetry arose from discovering meanings that were expressed in unusual ways (such as farfetched metaphors and similes, paronomasia, obscure wording and sentence structures, and combining disparate items).<sup>89</sup> Indeed, this sense of delight and wonder has been identified as being the central criterion in evaluating poetic excellence in Arabic poetry of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.<sup>90</sup> Ambiguity and multiple levels of possible meaning in such poetry can be appreciated by audiences; in poetry there was often no presumption of truth-value. Literary critics of the post-classical era, such as the Maghrebi scholars al-Qarṭāġannī (d. 684/1285) and al-Siġilmāsī (d. 704/1304) who were Ibn Sahl’s contemporaries, generally considered the category of truth-value not to apply to poetry—that is, poetic speech could not be considered “true” or “untrue”—though they may still disapprove of blatant untruths in it.<sup>91</sup> Thus, if Ibn Sahl conveyed meanings in his poetry that pushed the bounds, it must be taken into account that this may have been more acceptable in poetry than in other types of speech. Read through this perspective on Arabic poetics, what made Ibn Sahl’s poetry so excellent was its use of *badī*’-figures in ways that created for the listener the experience of discovering and marveling at a meaning that was expressed in surprising and nimble ways. In particular, the ways in which Ibn Sahl embedded different types of intertextual references into his poetry would cause the audience to exert effort to discover the meanings conferred by these references, and according to the poetics of the time,

the more effort the audience engaged to discover the meaning, the more excellent the poetry was deemed to be.

Ibn Sahl’s statement “For people what is manifest, and for God what is hidden” blurs the line between poetry and response, between poetic speaker and personal self. Although it was a response to a direct question, the rhymed, elusive (and allusive) answer speaks to the level on which Ibn Sahl’s poetry communicates meaning. Taking a cue from the literary critical approaches of his day, perhaps it is fitting to conclude that his poetry provides no final answer for his audiences’ curiosity; instead, this curiosity is maintained through the way the poetry is constructed. Its use of rhetorical devices and intertextual references creates a distinctive aesthetic that, together with the openness to multiple interpretations it maintains, renders Ibn Sahl’s poetry compelling and captivating for audiences across the centuries.

### Acknowledgement

I thank the anonymous reviewers at *Al-Qanṭara* for their helpful insights and suggestions. I am grateful to Amin Bonnah, who first encouraged me to work on Ibn Sahl’s poetry, including through supervising my senior honors thesis on this topic at Georgetown University in 2009-2010. My thanks also go to Kirsten Beck and Tasi Perkins for their helpful feedback and encouragement.

### Sources and Bibliography

#### Sources

- Abdel Haleem, M.A.S., *The Qur’an: A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.
- al-Ḥaṭṭābī, Abū Sulayman Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad, *Bayān i’ġāz al-Qur’ān*, in *Talāt rasā’il fi i’ġāz al-Qur’ān*, Muḥammad Ḥalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaġlūl Sallām (eds.), Cairo, Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1968, pp. 19-65.
- Ibn Sahl, Ibrāhīm, *Dīwān ibn Sahl al-Isrā’īlī*, Iḥsān ‘Abbās (ed.), Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1967.
- al-Ifrānī, Muḥammad, *Al-Maslak al-sahl fi sarḥ tawṣīḥ ibn Sahl*, Muḥammad al-‘Umri (intro. and ed.), Morocco, Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs, 1997.
- Kātip Ćelebi, *Kitāb kaṣf al-zunūn ‘an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn*, vol. 2, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Atā (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1971.
- al-Maqqarī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, *Naḥḥ al-tīb min ġusn al-Andalus al-ratīb*, vol. 3, Iḥsān ‘Abbās (ed.), Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, 1968.

<sup>89</sup> Lara Harb has explored the role of wonder in poetic speech in this cultural milieu in her recent *Arabic Poetics*.

<sup>90</sup> See Harb, *Arabic Poetics*, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> See Harb, *Arabic Poetics*, pp. 75-134.

al-Marrākūshī, ‘Abd al-Wāhid, *Kitāb al-Mu‘ğib fī talhīs aḥbār al-Mağrib*, Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Hawwārī (ed.), Beirut, al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2006.

al-Rummānī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsa, *Al-Nukat fī I‘ğāz al-Qur‘ān*, in *Talāt rasā’il fī i‘ğāz al-Qur‘ān*, Muḥammad Ḥalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zağlūl Sallām (eds.), Cairo, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1968, pp. 69-104.

al-Ṣafādī, Ṣalāh al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-Wafayāt*, vol. 6, Aḥmad al-Arnā’ūt and Turkī Muṣṭafā (eds.), Beirut, Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2000.

## Bibliography

Abu-Zayd, Nasr, “The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur’an”, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 23 (2003), pp. 8-50.

Afsaruddin, Asma, “Arabic-Islamic Literature: Continuities and Transformations”, in Akbar S. Ahmed & Tamara Sonn (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Islamic Studies*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd., 2010, pp. 163-187.

Alharthī, Jokha, *The Body in Arabic Love Poetry: The ‘Udri Tradition*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

Alshdaifat, Abdallah, “The Formation of Verbs of Emotion in Arabic”, *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 13, 1 (2021), pp. 105-120.

‘Arār, Mahdī As‘ad, “Muqaddimat al-Mu‘allif”, in Mahdī As‘ad ‘Arār (ed.), *Dīwān Fayḍ al-Faḍl wa-Ġam‘ al-Ṣaml*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2010.

‘Atwī, ‘Alī Nağīb, *Ibn al-Fāriḍ, šā‘ir al-ğazal fī al-ḥubb al-ilāhī*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994.

Boullata, Issa J., “The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur’an: I‘jaz and Related Topics”, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur‘ān*, Piscataway NJ, Gorgias Press, 2013, pp. 139-157.

Brann, Ross, *The Compunctious Poet*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Brinner, William M., “Hārūt and Mārūt”, in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, [on line], available on: <[https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/\\*-EQSIM\\_00186](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/*-EQSIM_00186)>.

Calaway, Jared C., *The Christian Moses: Vision, authority, and the limits of humanity in the New Testament and early Christianity*, Montreal, McGill-Queen’s Press-MQUP, 2019.

Cornell, Rkia Elaroui, “Rabi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah”, in Michael Cooperson & Shawkat M. Toorawa (eds.), *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, Detroit, Thomson Gale, 2005, pp. 292-298.

Fierro, Maribel, “Again on Forced Conversion in the Almohad Period”, in Mercedes García-Arenal & Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (eds.), *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam: Coercion and*

*Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 111-132.

Fierro, Maribel, “Conversion, Ancestry and Universal Religion. The case of the Almohads in the Islamic West (sixth/twelfth–seventh/thirteenth centuries)”, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 2, 2 (2010), pp. 155-173.

Firestone, Reuven, “Yūsuf b. Ya‘qūb”, in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition*, Leiden, Brill, 2008, [on line], available on: <[https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/\\*-COM\\_1369](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/*-COM_1369)>.

Friedman, Rachel, “Scriptural Intertextuality in the Poetry of a Late Andalusī Convert”, *Prooftexts*, 36 (2018), pp. 335-354.

Gabrieli, Francesco, “Religious Poetry in Early Islam”, in G.E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1973, pp. 5-17.

Ġālī, Maḥrūs Manšāwī, *Abū Nuwās al-Andalusī: Ibn Sahl al-Isrā’īlī*, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī, 1986.

García-Arenal, Mercedes & Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, “Introduction”, in Mercedes García-Arenal & Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (eds.), *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 1-30.

Hamori, Andras, “Love poetry (ghazal)”, in Julia Ashtiany et al. (eds.), *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, 1990, pp. 202-218.

Hamori, Andras, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974.

Harb, Lara, *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Heinrichs, Wolfhart P., “Maṭbū‘ and Maṣnū‘”, in Julie Scott Meisami & Paul Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 516.

Hendricks, William O., “Open and Closed Texts”, *Semiotica*, 35, 3-4 (1981), pp. 361-379.

Homerin, Th. Emil, “Living Love: The Mystical Writings of ‘Ā’ishah al-Bā’ūniyya”, *Mamlūk Studies Review*, 7 (2003), pp. 211-234.

Ibrahim, Lutpi, “Az-Zamakhshari: His Life and Works”, *Islamic Studies*, 19, 2 (1980), pp. 95-110.

Ivry, Alfred L., “The Image of Moses in Maimonides’ Thought”, in Jay M. Harris (ed.), *Maimonides After 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 113-134.

Jacobi, Renate, “Time and Reality in ‘Nasīb’ and ‘Ghazal’”, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 16 (1985), pp. 1-17.

Khan, Ruqayya Yasmine, “On the Significance of Secrecy in the Medieval Arabic Romances”, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 31, 3 (2000), pp. 238-253.



- Lane, Edward, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2 vols., 1863, reprint, Beirut, Librarie du Liban, 1968.
- Lowin, Shari, *Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems in Al-Andalus*, London, Routledge, 2013.
- Madigan, Daniel, "Book", in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, [on line], available on: <[https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/\\*-EQCOM\\_00027](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/*-EQCOM_00027)>.
- McAuley, Denis, "Ibn 'Arabi and the Qur'an: A Series of Poems", in Denis E. McAuley (ed.), *Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Poetics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 59-92.
- Meisami, Julie S., "Ghazal", in Julie S. Meisami & Paul Starkey (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 249-250.
- Nykl, Alois R., *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours*, Baltimore, J.H. Furst Company, 1946.
- Pagis, Dan, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991.
- Paret, Rudi, "Ibrāhīm", in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition*, [on line], available on: <[https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/\\*-SIM\\_3430](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/*-SIM_3430)>.
- Polano, Hymen, *The Talmud: selections from the contents of that ancient book, its commentaries, teachings, poetry and legends: also, brief sketches of the men who made and commented upon it*, Philadelphia, Leary, Stuart & Co., 1876.
- "Qirā'a fī maḍmūn kitāb 'Laḥn al-'awwām fīmā yata'allaq bi-'ilm al-kalām' li-Abī 'Alī 'Umar al-Sakūnī (t. 717 H.)", blog of al-Rābiṭa al-Muḥammadiyya li-l-'Ulamā', 18 May 2021, [on line], available on: <<https://www.arrabita.ma/blog/قراءۃ-في-مضمون-كتاب-لحن-العوام-فيما-بيت>>.
- Reinkowski, Maurus, "Hidden Believers, Hidden Apostates. The phenomenon of Crypto-Jews and Crypto-Christians in the Middle East", in Dennis Washburn & A. Kevin Reinhart (eds.), *Converting Cultures: Religion, ideology, of transformations of modernity*, Boston, Brill, 2007, pp. 409-433.
- Roth, Norman, *Jews, Visigoths, and Muslims in Medieval Spain: Cooperation and conflict*, New York, Brill, 1994.
- Safi, Omid, "al-Hallāj", in Michael Cooperson & Shawkat M. Toorawa (eds.), *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, Detroit, Thomson Gale, 2005, pp. 114-120.
- Scheindlin, Raymond, "Contrasting Religious Experience in the Liturgical Poems of Ibn Gabirol and Judah Halevi", *Prooftexts*, 13, 2 (1993), pp. 141-162.
- Scheindlin, Raymond, "Ibn Sahl al-Ishbili (609-49/1212-51)", in Julie Scott Meisami & Paul Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, p. 367.
- Schick, Shana Strauch, "Behind Every Great Prophet is a Woman: The women in Exodus 2 in Talmudic interpretation", in Shaul Seidler-Feller & David N. Myers (eds.), *Swimming against the Current: Reimagining Jewish tradition in the twenty-first century. Essays in honor of Chaim Seidler-Feller*, Boston, Academic Studies Press, 2020, pp. 26-42.
- Schippers, Arie, "Humorous Approach of the Divine in the Poetry of al-Andalus: The case of Ibn Sahl", in Gert Borg & Ed de Moor (eds.), *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry*, Atlanta, Rodopi, 2001, pp. 119-138.
- Seidman, Naomi, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian difference and the politics of translation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Sells, Michael, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The early revelations*, Ashland, OR, White Cloud Press, 1997.
- Sells, Michael, "Love", in Maria Rose Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin & Michael Sells (eds.), *The Literature of al-Andalus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Soualah, Mohammed, *Ibrahim b. Sahl: Poète musulman d'Espagne, son pays, sa vie, son œuvre et sa valeur littéraire*, Algiers, Adolphe Jourdan, 1914.
- Stern, David, "New Directions in Medieval Poetry", *Prooftexts*, 1, 1 (1981), pp. 104-115.
- Stetkevych, Jaroslav, "The Arabic Lyrical Phenomenon in Context", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 6 (1975), pp. 57-77.
- Tanenbaum, Adena, "Sacred and Suggestive: The Many Faces of Medieval Hebrew Poetry from Spain", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 107, 2 (2017), pp. 247-266.
- Tobi, Yosef, *Proximity and Distance: Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Poetry*, Murray Rosovsky (trans.), Leiden, Brill, 2004.
- Vajda, Georges, "Hārūt wa-Mārūt", in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, [on line], available on: <[https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/\\*-SIM\\_2750](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/*-SIM_2750)>.
- Verskin, Alan, "Medieval Jewish Perspectives on Almohad Persecutions. Memory, Repression and Impact", in Mercedes García-Arenal & Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (eds.), *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 155-172.
- Yovel, Yirmiyahu, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of reason*, vol. 1, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992.