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CONTENTS

ADLER, CYRUS: Review of "The World of Art Series. Arts and Crafts of Ancient Egypt" by W. M. Flinders Petrie 251

ADLER, CYRUS: Review of "The Holy Land" by Robert Hichens 255

AMRAM, DAVID WERNER: Retaliation and Compensation 191

APTOWITZER, V.: The Controversy over the Syro-Roman Code 55

BACHER, W.: More about the Poetry of the Jews of Yemen 373

BRODY, H.: Some Notes to "Poetic Fragments from the Genizah II" by Israel Davidson 155

COHEN, S. SOLIS: Review of "Jewish Dietary Laws from a Scientific Standpoint" by N. E. Aronstam 617

DAVIDSON, ISRAEL: Poetic Fragments from the Genizah III 221

DAVIDSON, ISRAEL: Hebrew and Yiddish 285

FRIEDLAENDER, ISRAEL: Jewish-Arabic Studies 481

GREENSTONE, JULIUS H.: Review of Books on Religious Pedagogy 245

GRUENHUT, L.: Jazer and its Site 241

HALPER, B.: The Reference to Trellis-work in Psalm 74, 5 585

HOSCHANDER, JACOB: Review of "The Old Testament among the Semitic Religions" by George Ricker Berry 149

HOSCHANDER, JACOB: Review of "Arabic Prose Composition" by T. H. Weir 152

HOSCHANDER, JACOB: Review of Recent Assyro-Babylonian Literature 607

HUSIK, ISAAC: An Anonymous Medieval Christian Critic of Maimonides 159

III
KLEIN, SAMUEL: The Estates of R. Judah Ha-Nasi and the Jewish Communities in the Trans-Jordanic Region 545
KRAUSS, SAMUEL: A Moses Legend 339
MALTER, HENRY: A Talmudic Problem and Proposed Solutions 75
MALTER, HENRY: Review of Recent Jewish Literature 271
MALTER, HENRY: Personifications of Soul and Body 453
MARGOLIS, MAX L.: The Elephantine Documents 419
MARGOLIS, MAX L.: Review of Recent Works on the Lexicon and Grammar of Hebrew-Aramaic 281
MARX, ALEXANDER: Review of “Aboda Zara. Der Mišnatraktat ‘Götzendienst’” by Hermann L. Strack 143
MARX, ALEXANDER: The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain 257
MARX, ALEXANDER: Review of “The ‘Rommi’ Mishnah” 266
MORDELL, PHINEAS: Origin of Letters and Numerals in Sefer Yesirah 557
PERLES, FELIX: A Miscellany of Lexical and Textual Notes on the Bible Chiefly in Connection with the Fifteenth Edition of the Lexicon by Gesenius-Buhl 97
POZNANSKI, S.: Review of Recent Karaite Publications 445
REVEL, BERNARD: Inquiry into the Sources of Karaite Halakah 517
RHINE, A. B.: The Secular Hebrew Poetry of Italy, Chapter IV 25
SEGAL, M. H.: Notes on “Fragments of a Zadokite Work” by S. Schechter 133
TISDALL, W. ST. CLAIR: The Aryan Words in the Old Testament II and III 213, 365
WOLFSON, HARRY: Maimonides and Halevi 207
WYNNKOOP, J. D.: A Peculiar Kind of Paronomasia in the Talmud and Midrash 1
CONTENTS

A PECULIAR KIND OF PARONOMASIA IN THE TALMUD AND MIDRASH.
J. D. WYNKOOP .................................................. 1

THE SECULAR HEBREW POETRY OF ITALY.
Dr. A. B. RHINE .................................................. 25

THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE SYRO-ROMAN CODE.
Dr. V. APTOWITZER ........................................... 53

A TALMUDIC PROBLEM AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS.
Prof. HENRY MALTER ......................................... 75

CRITICAL NOTICES:
A MISCELLANY OF LEXICAL AND TEXTUAL NOTES ON THE BIBLE.
Dr. FELIX PERLER ............................................... 97

NOTES ON "FRAGMENTS OF A ZADOKITE WORK."
Rev. M. H. SEGAL ............................................... 133

STRACK’S "ABODA ZARA."
Prof. ALEXANDER MARZ ..................................... 143

BERRY’S "OLD TESTAMENT AMONG SEMITIC RELIGIONS."
Dr. JACOB HOSCHANDER .................................. 149

WEIR’S "ARABIC PROSE COMPOSITION."
Dr. JACOB HOSCHANDER .................................. 152

SOME NOTES TO "DAVIDSON’S POETIC FRAGMENTS FROM THE GENIZAH II."
Dr. H. BRODY .................................................. 155

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A PECULIAR KIND OF PARONOMASIA IN THE TALMUD AND MIDRASH

By the Late J. D. WYNKOOP, Amsterdam

Translated from the Dutch by P. Van den Biesen

God said to Abraham, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to tell them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. Gen. 15, 5. In the same manner we may say to a Talmud scholar: 'Try to fix the number of Tannaim and Amoraim that occur in both Talmuds, Baraita, and the haggadic writings,' for their number is exceedingly great; nor is it easy to decide with certainty which particular saying each sage enunciated or which opinion he favored. Indeed, even as regards well known persons, whose names constantly recur in these different writings, it is obvious that the compilers did not always record with strict accuracy, who said this or who said that; who gave this explanation or who gave that. But, unless this point be ascertained from different documents, independent of each other, or from reliable parallel passages, we cannot be absolutely confident that the person, to whom the saying is attributed, is the author. Every Talmud student knows that an author is often deprived of his claim to a saying with which he had been credited, and that even the very names of sages are frequently open to dispute. I see no sufficient grounds for admitting that every age had its registrar whose business was to
record the opinions and expositions of the sages of his time, whether as regards the sayings in the Mishna and Baraitha, or as regards those in the Talmudim and Midrashim. Only sporadic notices are found of anything like records and chronicles, such as מנהלה חכמים, מנהלה רבי עקיבא, מנהלה חכמים, etc., and these were the sources of information for later compilers. But as the latter lived some centuries later than the authors of the Halakah and Haggadah, a perfect accuracy on all points would have been a superhuman achievement. No doubt, all possible care was taken as regards the sayings themselves, specially those of the Halakah (and yet, as Talmud scholars know, not even these are always free from inaccuracies); but the names of the sages were regarded as of minor importance, particularly in the case of non-halakic statements, and, therefore, cannot be held as incontrovertible. Now, of the above named works, the Mishna and Baraitha are almost the only ones wherein very frequently opinions are recorded without the names of those that advanced them, but in the remaining works comparatively few anonymous sayings occur. Sometimes also the name of the sage is very strange and uncommon.

I am of opinion that we should not always take these names in too serious a manner, and that often the name or surname of a sage owes its origin to a peculiarity in the saying attributed to him. For I was, more than once, forcibly struck by the marked resemblance which the name or surname of an author betrays to the saying assigned to him. But I would first like to show, by means of a few examples, that the compilers of the above-named works were not averse to the device of effecting a certain con-
sonance or harmony of sound between the names of sages and their sayings.

In the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b, and in the Midrash Rabba Ekah, ch. I, § 51, the following passage occurs:

What is the name of the Messiah?—The followers of Rabbi Shîla say: Shiloh is his name, because it is written, Until Shiloh come (Gen. 49, 10). The followers of Rabbi Jannai say: Jinnon is his name, because it is written, May his name endure forever, may it continue (jinnon) as long as the sun (Ps. 72, 17). The followers of Rabbi Haninah, say Haninah, for it is written: I will show you no favor (haninah) (Jer. 16, 13). Rashi already observed as regards 'תפוח' (Sanhedrin, *ibidem*) that it greatly resembles 'ינא'; and so we may infer from this passage that there were three schools that gave the Messiah (משיח) a name similar to that of their master.

In the Babylonian Talmud (Berakot 39b) a discussion is recorded between two sages whether the larger of two loaves, though a piece be cut off from it, should be used by preference for the blessing רברת התפתיא. In the midst of this discussion someone reminds Rabbi Naḥman bar Isaac of a Baraitha, containing a compromise between the two opinions; viz. מניי המשנה התנאיה הספר, 'If there be two loaves, a larger one with a piece cut off, and a smaller one; both loaves should be taken while the blessing is said.' Thereupon Rabbi Naḥman asked the person who gave the quotation, to tell his name. He replied,
Shalman. Then said R. Naḥman: Thou art שלום ('peace') and your citation is שלמה ('peaceful'), for thou hast reconciled two sages.

It may appear, at first sight, strange that Rabbi Naḥman bar Isaac should not have heard of Rabbi Shalman. For, according to Seder ha-Dorot, Book III, (Warsaw 1897), Rabbi Naḥman was the head of the college at Pumbeditha after the death of Raba רבא. Now, R. Shalman is named before Raba in the Babylonian Talmud, Bešaḥ 5b, where his opinion, though based on different grounds, is said to agree with that of Raba, but to be opposed to that of other scholars. R. Shalman, therefore, was older than Raba, because the Talmud on the whole takes account of the chronological order when recording different opinions. Yet, it remains possible that R. Naḥman did not know his name, for as appears from the last named passage, he came from a different place. Again, there is the other alternative that R. Naḥman knew R. Shalman's name, and that his question merely served to elicit an answer; just as for instance Rab acted towards Karna: Shabbat 108a.

But be this as it may, Rabbi Nahman bar Isaac playfully alludes to the meaning of R. Shalman's name, which signifies peace, because the latter had effected a compromise between two conflicting opinions. Undoubtedly the phrase שלמה משטרת is an allusion to the term שלמה, occurring in the Baraita and cited by R. Shalman.

It is possible, moreover, that the name of R. Shalman, which seldom is found in the Talmud, owes in some manner or other its origin to the passage והנה ב רב שלאן בשתנין והם, Baba Batra 13b. For, if both sides acquiesce, there is agreement, concord, שלום. And the same
remark applies to the saying of R. Shalman as regards Abaye in Baba Kamma 89a.

Let me add the well known saying of R. Pappe, addressed to R. Bebe bar Abaye, or that of Huna, the son of Joshua, addressed to Raba, which occurs several times in the Talmud.

משומ דאתי ממלא אמרית מיל דמליתיאת

'Because thou hailest from ממלא (others understand this differently; see Rashi, Rashbam, and Aruk, s. v. ממלא VII), thou sayest, etc.'

It appears, therefore, to me that connection and similarity between the name of an author (or of his birthplace) and the saying attributed to him were liked and appreciated by the redactors of the Talmud and Midrash. And proceeding on this basis, I think, I have discovered in this peculiar use of paronomasia the clue to the explanation of the origin of several names in the halakic and haggadic works, but especially in the latter.

1. In the passage:

רבי יוחנן אוסר איה השחתה שנאמר רבי

Midrash Shōrer Tob on Ps. 18, 35, the name of Rabbi Joshua seems to have been suggested by the words איה השחתה. From the context we know that one of the Amoraim is speaking; and Amoraim with the name Joshua always have in addition either a surname or a father’s name. My conjecture is confirmed by Yalkût, Genesis, ch. 10, where we find the words ובן ישועה anonymously recorded.

Once the words איה השחתה had occurred in Midrash Shōrer Tob (quoted above) as the saying of Rabbi Joshua, we find that in Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 6, a father is given to him; and he is now called Rabbi Joshua son of
Rabbi Nehemiah; so also in Midrash Rabba, Lev., ch. 35. His name again occurs with a fresh addition in Midrash Shoher Tob, on Ps. 80 (the beginning), viz. Rabbi Joshua ha-Kohen son of Rabbi Nehemiah. And finally, we come across his name in Yalkut, II Sam., ch. 162, with the following modification, Rabbi Joshua bar Naḥmani (no doubt an imitation of the name Samuel bar Naḥmani), unless, as the author of Sepher Yohasin thinks, he is to be identified with the above named Rabbi Samuel’s brother whom, however, the writer of Seder ha-Dorot could nowhere find.

2. In Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 84, we read:

בֵּיתּוֹ קַלָּא שָׂמוּנָה יְהוֹ הָאָחָי לַהֲמוּם יְהוֹ הָשָׁמֵעָה
רָחֲבָה בַּשֵּׁם יִוְהָה יִבְשֶׁם נַמְתַּא חַיָּב נַמְתַּא

The same saying occurs anonymously in Yalkut, ch. 140. Probably it was assigned to Rabbi Isaac because it deals exclusively with the Patriarch Isaac.

3. A similar instance we find in the following passage, Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 92:

אֶרֶץ רֶבֶן הוֹמָלָא שָׂמוּנָה יְהוֹ הָאָחָי לַהֲמוּם יְהוֹ הָשָׁמֵעָה
בֵּיתְמֶן

The saying also recurs anonymously in Yalkut, Gen., chaps. 133, 150. Nowhere, moreover, is Rabbi Benjamin mentioned without a surname or father’s name. Thus the conjecture is obvious that the saying was attributed to a sage named Rabbi Benjamin, because it contained something to the credit of the Patriarch Benjamin.

It should be noticed that in Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 78, the same saying is quoted with the name of the well known Rabbi Benjamin affixed to it.

4. It is probably not a mere coincidence that in Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 98, the following phrase is found in connection with I Chron. 5, 14.
PARONOMASIA IN TALMUD AND MIDRASH—WYNKOOP

We read in Midrash Rabba, Ex., ch. 1, on 1, 21:

"Rab and Levi dispute the meaning of the term Houses. The one maintains that these 'houses' are families of priests and Levites, the other that they are dynasties of kings."

In the same Midrash Rabba, ch. 48, a portion of this passage is quoted but anonymously and without the word Levites, viz.

"and what are these houses? a sacerdotal family and a royal dynasty."  

We find something similar in Siphre, section בַּחֲשָׁלֵוחַ, § 78.

Also in Soṭah 11b, difference of opinion is expressed on this point, but there the disputants are, instead of Rab and Levi, Rab and Samuel, whose statements on the whole are identical with those in Midrash Rabba, Ex., ch. 1. No doubt, the reading of the Babylonian Talmud is the correct one, for the subject treated of in Ex., ch. 1, occasioned several other discussions between Rab and Samuel. In Soṭah 11a and 11b, some of their differences are mentioned and one of them is spoken of also in Erubin 53a. Both Rab and Samuel again take part in the same discussion in Midrash Rabba, Exodus. Finally, in Soṭah, quoted above, Samuel is one of the principal exponents of Exodus, chap. 1.

The question now arises how shall we in the passage quoted first, viz. Midrash Rabba, Exodus, chap. 1, account
for the name Levi, the name of a scholar who, especially on halakic subjects, is often in conflict with Rab? The answer is obvious. Levi is a mistake for Samuel; and this mistake was occasioned by the word לֵוָי, occurring along with the word בֵּית נַחַמָּה.

6. In Midrash Rabba, Exodus, ch. 51, we read on 33, 8:

In the same place a different explanation is given of this verse by Rabbi Johanan. Both opinions are anonymously quoted in the Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 4, 13 and Bikkurim 3, 3. Moreover, in the Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 33b, and in Yalkut, Exodus, ch. 393, the saying of Rabbi Ḥama (רבי חמא) is attributed to Rabbi Amme (רבי אמי). Now, if we take into consideration that Rabbi Ḥama is very seldom, perhaps never, mentioned without his father's name (for Rabbi Ḥama, the principal of the school at Nehardea, 357-372 C. E., is always called רב חמא מנהריא [Sanhedrin 17b]), the name Amme would seem to be the true reading and the name Ḥama to be a mistake occasioned by its similarity with חמא.

7. In Midrash Rabba, Exodus, chap. 41, and Leviticus, chap. 35, we read:

But Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 6, and Yalkut, II Sam., ch. 162, have the reading רְבֵּי חָתיָה יִנְהָה מְנָהָה לַעֲלָם, Rabbi Johanan, while in Midrash Shoher Tob on Ps. 18, 35, and in Yalkut, Gen. ch. 10, and ibidem., Leviticus, ch. 67: the passage occurs anonymously. The probable explanation is that the name Jonathan was suggested to the scribe by the word יְנֵנה מֵתוֹה, all three words being derived from the same stem וּנְח.
The two names Jonathan and Joḥanan were confounded; a not uncommon error in the Talmud.

8. It cannot well be the work of chance that in Midrash Rabba, Numbers, where frequently subjects are discussed touching the tribe Levi, several sayings are attributed to the well known Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and to Rabbi Jehudah ben Levi, the latter of whom seldom occurs save a few times in chaps. 3, 4, and 7.

9. Nor can it be regarded a pure coincidence that Rabbi Berechiah רבי ברקיה is the principal speaker in Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 39, where the blessings of Abraham, Gen. 12, 2. 3, and those of Isaac, Gen., 27, 28, are discussed.

So also in Yalkut, where names of authors are scarce, Rabbi Berechiah is mentioned in the discussions on the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49), of the priests' blessing (Num. 6, 24), and of the blessing of Moses (Deut. 34).

10. In Midrash Rabba, Song of Songs, 8, 11, we read:

ר וַיָּכָשׁ יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן מִלְאוֹנִי הֵבֵֽאָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן מִלְאוֹנִי הֵבֵֽאָה

I cannot find the name יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן elsewhere. It possibly is the name of the sage called יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן in the Jerusalem Talmud, Gitin 1, 5, who appears to have been a pupil of Rabbi Johanan. But it is more probable that it was a clerical error for יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן, a name which occurs in Midrash Rabba, Eccl., 9, 11, in Midrash Samuel, ch. 17 (towards the end), in Pesikta de Rabbi Kahana, p. 45b, in Yalkut, Exodus, ch. 362 (towards the end), and ibidem. Psalms, ch. 795. Assuming יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן to be a mistake for יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן, it was undoubtedly occasioned by the words יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן, for they are omitted in Midrash Rabba, Num., ch. 11, where, moreover, instead of the name יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן we find יְהוָה אֶלֶ֖יוּן.

11. A clerical error of the same kind is found in
Midrash Rabba, Ruth, ch. 5, § 4, on Ruth 2, 12:

In Pesiqta de Rabbi Kahana the name is יְהוָה, and there the editor (S. Buber) already pointed out that יְהוָה in Midrash Rabba was a printer’s error, though in my opinion the mistake was made by the scribe. But how did this mistake happen? Probably, it is due to resemblance of יְהוָה to יהוה and to the term יְהוָה which is a few times repeated in this passage.

12. In Midrash Rabba, Ekah, ch. 1, on Lam. 1, 1, we read:

In this passage, the haggadic interpretation of the three verses, Lam. 1, 1 and 2, 4, 5, is attributed to the well known Rabbi Abba bar Kahana. All the same, יְהוָה also appears as author of the remarks on Lam. 2, 4, 5. If we consider that both verses contain the term יְהוָה ‘enemy,’ and that as well the name יְהוָה as the term יְהוָה is derived from the root יְהוָה ‘to be hostile,’ and that, on the contrary יְהוָה means ‘father,’ it is obvious that here the name יְהוָה owes its origin to the word יְהוָה. Furthermore, it should be noticed that in Yalkût, Hosea, ch. 521, all the three observations are attributed to יְהוָה.

13. Rabbi Simon ben Yohai is credited in the tractate Berakot, with several haggadic comments. But among them there is one on Ps. 3, 1

‘A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son,’ which is attributed to Rabbi Simon ben Absalom.
both here and in Yalkût, Ps. 3, 1, though in 'En Jacob, Berakot, *ibidem*, the same is again assigned to Rabbi Simon ben Yoḥai.

It is evident that the name Rabbi Simon ben Yoḥai is correct and that the scribe substituted that of Absalom, because the verse, commented on, mentions the flight of David before *Absalom*. And of this I am convinced despite the fact that Absalom is the paternal name of several scholars, e. g. Nathan ben Absalom (Berakot 22a), Hanan ben Absalom (Mishna Ketubot 13, 1, cf. Tosafot, *ibidem*, p. 104b), and Rabbi Simon ben Absalom (Megillah 14a).

14. In Yoma 69b we read:

אומר בר נוֹלָלָ לְכִּי הָפִּもり

And a little further:

בְּמַשְׁרָא אֶלֶּה דִּבְּרָא הַמִּקְדֶשׁ בִּשְׁמַיָּהוּ בֵּיתָן בֵּית

"In Palestine they teach: Rabbi Giddel says, etc." where no doubt we have an allusion to a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah, ch. 3 (towards the end). And again in the same tractate Yoma, but a little higher, we read:

בר נוֹלָלָ אָמָר קְדוֹם הַמִּקְדֶשׁ אֲלֵוהִי שֶׁאֵלָא אָנוּ

An exposition of the difficulties in this paragraph we find in the commentaries of 'En Jacob, *ibidem*. As for the variants, in the three passages quoted, they may be removed by reading:

אָמָר בר נוֹלָלָ לְכִּי הָפִּもり

which is the text in Masseket Soferim, ch. 13, § 8. The name נוֹלָלָ probably owes its origin to the word נוֹלָל and its insertion into the sentence is all the more intelligible as Rabbi Giddel was the disciple of Rab.

15. Something similar we find in the Jerusalem Talmud, tract. Sukkah 5, and in Yalkût, Jonah, ch. 550:

אָנִי וְהָאָרָא הָאִתֶּלֶלֶל הָרִיבָל הָיוֹתִים
In Seder ha-Dorot, s. v. Jonah, where the passages containing Rabbi Jonah’s name are registered, this particular phrase is omitted. It is obvious, therefore, that in the citation given above, the scribe makes Rabbi Jonah say something concerning the prophet Jonah which was in reality a saying of Rab or more probably of Rabbi.

16. We read in Shabbat 22a:

רבי שמואל מרב מתי אמר משה

The name of Rabbi Samuel of Difte does not occur elsewhere, but the name of Rabbi Jeremiah of Difte is found in the Talmud, and to him is attributed the saying in Sheektot de Rabbi Achai, section 26. It is evident that the name שמואל here is due to the saying משמואל.

17. In Baba Meśia 25a, we read:

אסי צוחק מידראשת והוה שמשוח LIMIT

It is most probable that the surname Magdala’a מידראשת was occasioned by the word מידראשת. The explanation itself, no doubt, was taken from the Baraitha, which is subsequently quoted to confirm it. I am aware that the name Rabbi Isaac Magdala’a occurs a few times in the Talmud, viz. Yoma 81b, Shabbat 139a, Niddah 27b, 33a. It is also found in the Midrash, e. g. Gen. rabba, ch. 98 (towards the end), Num. rabba, ch. 14, Gen. rabba, ch. 5, in a very difficult and obscure passage, which also occurs in Midrash Gen. rabba, ch. 20, where the word מידראשת is omitted, and where the explanation of Rashi, containing the stem גל, should be consulted. All the same, I think that in the above quoted passage, Baba Meśia, the surname of Rabbi Isaac Magdala’a has its origin in the statement attributed to him, seeing that the name רבי זיסו, Rabbi
Isaac, is very conspicuous in the explanations in the first paragraphs of Baba Mešia, ch. 2.

18. It is remarkable that the term מֵסֶל ‘olive-press,’ Baba Batra 67b, is explained by the sage רַב אֶזֶר חֶרֶן. He is three times mentioned in this tractate, but does not appear elsewhere in the Talmud. If those who identify him with רב אֶזֶר חֶרֶן, whose father’s name is not stated, be right, the name מֵסֶל would seem to have been added because of the term מֵסֶל ‘olive-press.’

19. In the same tractate 90b we read that Rabbi Jose bar Ḥanina said to מֵסֶל, his servant, מֵסֶל. The correct name of the servant is very uncertain. Sepher Yoḥasin has the reading מֵסֶל. The Munich manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud (see Dikduke Sofrim on this passage) also has מֵסֶל, and there, moreover, it appears that the Hamburg manuscript and the Pesaro edition read, מֵסֶל. Is it not probable, therefore, that the name מֵסֶל in our edition was suggested by the term מֵסֶל?

20. The Babyl. Talmud, Berakot 53b, contains in the Baraita, שֶׁנֶּאֶם מֵעֱבָּר אֶת הָעָרָה, some very strange names of Tannaites, viz. ר וּלְאֵל, ר וּלְאֵל, names which greatly resemble each other and do not occur elsewhere in the Talmud. After their names we meet with the following passage:

ר וּלְאֵל, אָמוֹר אוֹמְרָה מֵעֱבוֹת מַסֵּל, וּלְאֵל מַשְׁפְּהָה מַסְּלָה

The purport of this saying agrees with that of Rabbi Aha and Rabbi Zilai, ibidem. The name of its author, however, does not occur elsewhere (perhaps it is implied in the saying of Rabbi Nahman bar Isaac). Is it not obvious that the name וּלְאֵל, which is not very pleasing to the ear, was
given to him because of its affinity to the stem רמש, which occurs twice in this passage?

21. In Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 18, we read:

רֶפֶן אֲבֹתֵךְ וְאֵסֶרֶתֵךְ הָלָם בֵּית דִּיְבַנֶּהָ הָוָא תְּלַל הָלָם בֵּית דִּיְבַנֶּהָ

This statement occurs a few times in the Babylonian Talmud, e.g. Shabbat 96a, Berakot 61a, Erubin 18a, Niddah 46b, but always as of Rabbi Simon ben Menashya. The name דִּיְבַנֶּה, in the passage quoted, is no doubt fictitious, and was suggested by the word דְּניָה, which is the principal word in the whole sentence, and which is used to explain דְּנוּר, Gen. 2, 22.

22. In Midrash Rabba, Ex., ch. 21, we find several expositions in connection with the phrase מֵתוֹת עֲצֵקָא אֵילֶךְ אָסֶרֶתֵךְ וְאָסֶרֶתֵךְ הָלָם לֶזַּה בֵּית דִּיְבַנֶּהָ אֵילֶךְ לֶזַּה בֵּית דִּיְבַנֶּהָ (Gen. 28, 14)

But in Yalkût, ch. 120, we find that, on this passage from Gen., Rabbi Abba bar Hanina says:

אֶת הָרֵכֶת יִרְמָם שֵׁנֵאָמִר מַהֲרַךְ וּבָר

In Yalkût, Micah, ch. 551, the same statement is assigned to Rabbi Jose bar Kahana on the authority of Rabbi Abba bar Hanina, and in Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 69, the passage is attributed to Rabbi Abba bar Kahana.

How then can we account for the name of Rabbi Akiba in Midrash Rabba, Exodus? Rabbi Akiba cannot have heard what he says from R. Abba, who lived long after him. No doubt his name is due to its resemblance to the name דִּיָּבֵק, which occurs in the same passage.

23. In the same manner, we can account for the reading רֶפֶן בַּה הָוָא בַּהֲרָמִי in Shabbat 104b:

אִיִּלֶךְ דְּלִיאָרָה לֶזַּה בֵּית דִּיָּבֵק בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָא בַּה הָוָa
For in Tosefta, Shabbat, ch. 12 (edition Zuckermandel), the name is בֵּן סַתוֹדָא, Ben Satoda (see Blau, Altjüdisches Zauberverwesen, 41, n. 1); and so also in the Jerusalem Talmud, Yeabmot 16, 6; but the name is omitted in the parallel passage, Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 7, 12. The explanation of this mistake is that in tract. Shabbat, quoted above, there is mention made of רַבָּא הָלָא בֵּשָּׁר.

24. It cannot be pure coincidence that the words אֲרָא לֶא אֲרָא in Deut. 27, 26, in the Jerusalem Talmud, Sotah 7, 4, are explained by one called אֲרָא שֶׁמֶשׁ אֲרָא, who is very seldom or perhaps never heard of again. He is probably to be identified with Rabbi Simon ben Eliakim, whose name occurs a few times in the Talmud (this passage is quoted by Nahmanides on Deut., ibidem).

25. This desire for paronomasia may also account for the use of some very rare and uncommon words. We read in the Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 71a:

פִּירַס יִוְרָה בַּן קַנָּה לִכְלָא רֵאָה הָלָא פִּירַס

How shall we account, in the Babylonian Talmud, for the use of the genuine old Hebrew word פִּירַס, with the meaning to explain, which is already found in Num. 15, 34? אֲרָא, which is also Aramaic, was the verb one would have expected, or if the idea of elucidation was insisted upon, the word אֲרָא. No doubt the scribe, in selecting the word אֲרָא פִּירַס, was led by his love of paronomasia. Its connection with the phrase, in which it occurs, is obvious.

26. The same fondness for paronomasia may have led writers to modernize certain names. I refer to a passage in Midrash Rabba, Num., ch. 7:

אֵרָא מַרְיָא אֲרָא סְפִּיטָא מִן שֶׁלֶּאָה היה בַּת קִסּוֹת נֹרָה

whereas in the same place, ch. 13, we read:

יִאֵן בַּסְמָה רֶ שֶּׁפִּיטָא בַּת יִוְרָה בַּהֲשָׁר שֶׁפֶךְ הָלָא חָפְסָה בּוּרָה
And so the passage is found also in Midrash Rabba, Song of Songs, ch. 4, § 7. Now, it is well known that Rabbi Simon ben Yoḥai, in the Talmud and Mishna, is commonly called Rabbi Simon. In the first of the two citations, therefore, ר' סמעון בן יוחאי, named in the second. As, moreover, the prevalent diction in Midrash Rabba, Numbers, is on the whole tolerably pure Hebrew, there is no reason why the name Rabbi Simon should have been Hellenized, and spelled סמואל, except for its resemblance to the word סמך, occurring in the same phrase.

27. In some instances, it would seem, the process is reversed, and sayings are recorded, because they contain words resembling the name of the person who is treated of. Thus we read in Soṭah 41b:

ואיש בר חצרת נשמו לשנה אנורבודין של חציוほか

How shall we account for the word ‘fist’?—Now and then we find in the Talmud the expression בלו אנורה, ‘violent men,’ lit. ‘men of the fist,’ a kind of synecdoche for בלו, ויהו ‘men of the arm’; e. g. Sanhedrin 21a. Such also is the explanation of Rashi, viz. כוח ‘power.’ But why is not the more common term used; or, rather, why not simply write: סמך שכרה חציו ‘from the day that hypocrisy increased,’ after the manner of several sayings which occur at the end of this treatise?—The answer is obvious. The term נ görוה is advisedly chosen, because there is question here of king אריה.

28. In a similar manner we may account for a statement occurring in Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 85.

רashi דבי מפרצון היה התו יאוה מצוה

Rashi explains מפרצון, ‘caravan,’ שיאוה, ‘caravan,’ sometimes also פיתם, is the more common word for cara-
van. Whether מברחתא occurs elsewhere with this meaning I do not know. But here, I think, it is used because of its resemblance to the name of the speaker אברחתא.

29. On the same principle a passage, occurring in the Babylonian Talmud, may be fitly explained: Nedarim 66b. In connection with a certain occurrence, we find the following remark:

"ו הוד יתיך ב' בן חי נא ב' בן חי ראה ידינו כל ידינו אברחתא נא ב' בן חי ראה ידינו כל ידינו אברחתא"

Samuel Edels rightly observes that it is not clear why it is stated that Baba ben Bota was seated at the door. His explanation is that, though he was not seated at the door, he was not far from it, and that this vicinity made the woman think that he was referred to in the saying of her husband וביאתא ראה ב' בן חי. I, for one, thought that וביאתא ראה ב' בן חי here is analogous to שער in Hebrew, which would obviate the difficulty raised by Samuel Edels. But if this were not so (and just now I cannot recollect a parallel instance, nor can I believe that it would have been unknown to such a Talmud-expert as Edels), then וביאתא נא ב' בן חי here is probably added by the scribe because of its similarity with the name וביאתא נא ב' בן חי. I am confirmed in this opinion by the coincidence that the term וביאתא does not occur in Seder ha-Dorot, where the incident is quoted.

I am bound, however, to point out that it is surprising to find here the name of Baba ben Bota, who, if we may rely on what is recorded in Baba Batra 3b, lived in the days of Herod. If, what is related of him, really took place, we would expect to find it mentioned in a Baraita.

30. In Midrash Rabba, Lev., ch. 1, we read:

"ר השיב הר הופר מעיד אמר כר היא השיבי והופר מעיד מה כר"
The same saying, but without the words כֵּן יَا שֶׁכֶר occurs in Yalkût, Job, ch. 897. The name of Rabbi Issachar of Chephar-mande is more than once met with in the Midrash; e. g. Midrash Rabba, Esther, ch. 7. I am inclined to think that the scribe, who copied Midrash Rabba, Lev., was reminded by the name Issachar of the passage נַתַּן אֲלָיוֹנָה שֶׁכֶּר, Gen. 30, 18, and thus was led to add the words, כֵּן יَا שֶׁכֶר.

31. Something similar must have happened in Midrash Rabba, Num., ch. 23; where we read:

ר' חֲשָׂעַ אָמְרָה נַפְלַאתָה עָשָׂתָה. חֲרוֹמָה נְתָתָה. עֵמֵךְ חֲשָׂעַ אָמֶרָה פָּרָה.

This saying occurs also in Midrash Yalkût, Tehillim, ch. 818, but with the following variation:

ר' חֲשָׂעַ אָמְרָה נַפְלַאתָה פָּרָה יָאִם בּוֹרֵב.

The conjecture lies at hand that the speaker in Midrash Rabba, Num., while quoting a saying of Rabbi Joshua, wished to use a phrase resembling the latter's name. Perhaps, he was thinking at the time of Ps. 44, 4.

32. In some cases the scribe appears to have proceeded even further in this direction, and to have aimed at producing a similarity of meaning between the name of the speaker and some word or other occurring in his statement. An instance of this, I think, I have found in Baba Batra 119a, as regards the passage:

איִי: חָדָקָא שְׁמֶנֶּה השֵּׁמֶנֶּה שְׁמֶנֶּה, יָהֲזַּל הָא מַתְּלָמְדִיָּה ר' עִקְּבָּא בּוֹרֵב.

This saying occurs also in Siphre, ch. 68, and 133 (Vienna 1864). The name Simon ha-Shikmoni does not seem to occur elsewhere. But according to another reading the name is חַסְפָּוֵן. See Dikduke Sofrim on this place.

The uncertainty concerning the name of Rabbi Hidka is even greater. In some manuscripts the name is
missing. In others we find the name of יר者は instead of Rabbi Ḥidka.

I think that the scribe, who took the surname to be כמשנים, invented the name כמשנים, or, vice versa, he, who read כמשנים, altered כמשנים into כמשנים. For, as is known, כמשנים or יר者は (Hebrew כמשן) is the Aramaic word for thorn, and is equivalent to the Hebrew כמשן.

33. It is quite possible also that sometimes the name given to a sage was suggested by its resemblance to the subject or purport of a Bible-passage on which he had expressed an opinion. This thought occurred to me while reading a saying, contained in the Midrash of Rabbi Nehunya ben Hakanaḥ (a work unknown to me), and quoted by Nahmanides in his Commentary on Deut. 22, 6. 7. 'If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way, in any tree, or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young: thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, but the young thou mayest take unto thyself; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest prolong thy days.' The subject dealt with is the statute known as אשר תשוה, and in connection with it something is recorded on the authority of Rabbi מאים, a name which, as far as I know, does not occur elsewhere in Midrash or Talmud. If we further consider that the statute expresses a humane feeling towards animals (רומם, see Mishna Berakot 5, 3, and Talmud Bab. ibidem, 33b), then it is quite obvious why the sage, who discussed this point, was called Rabbi מאים, i.e. 'mercy.'

34. Sometimes, it would seem, the name of a sage owes its origin to the initial letters of certain words con-
tained in his saying. An instance of this, I think, is found in Berakot 62b:

רב חנה בר נחמן וארם אפור אפורימא אפורי אשעיה.Be

Though the name אפורי repeatedly occurs in the Talmud, that of Rabbi Ḥana bar Ada is nowhere to be found. In the Babylonian Talmud, moreover, Megillah 29a, we find the same saying quoted on the authority of רמא. Is it not likely that the name of the sage was suggested to the scribe by the initial letters רא of the first two words in his saying?

35. We find another instance of this kind of paronomasia in Midrash Rabba, Deut., ch. 2, and in Midrash Shoḥer Ṭob, ch. 65.

ר חנה בר פפא שואל ליה שומואלי בר כוכבי מדיו כר איה שערו חולה פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פом

This saying is repeated in Midrash Shoḥer Ṭob, ch. 4, but without the words: רב פפא, viz.

רא חנה בחר פפא שואל ליה שומואלי מדיו מדיו כר איה שערו חולה פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פומימין פому

And again the same passage is found in Yalkût, Tehillim, ch. 69, but there the name of the sage is entirely omitted.

It is well known that Rabbi Samuel bar Naḥman, in Midrash Rabba, Deut., ch. 2, is the same person as Samuel ben Naḥman in Midrash Shoḥer Ṭob, ch. 65, and that he is often called Samuel or Rabbi Samuel, without his paternal name; for instance in the second of the two citations given above. Now, Rabbi Papa lived a century after Rabbi Samuel, and, therefore, Rabbi Ḥanina, the son of Papa, could not have addressed a question to Rabbi Samuel. This difficulty is obviated by adopting the reading of Midrash Shoḥer Ṭob, ch. 4, because Rabbi Ḥanina
(the same as Ḥanina bar Ḥama) was, like Rabbi Samuel, a disciple of Rabbi Jehudah Hanasi.

But what induced the scribe, in the first of the above quoted citations, viz. Midrash Rabba, Deut., ch. 2, and Shōḥer Tob, ch. 65, to add the name חסא? A satisfactory answer is furnished by his love for paronomasia. The repetition of the letter ש in the words סותים מותחים suggested to him the name חסא.

36. In the same manner we may account for the name of Rabbi Papa in Baba Kamma 54b

אָרָרָו חסא סותים דּוּרָא סמה דּוּרָא מִלַּהוּ תַּהוּ דּאָה בָּרַ בְּמַכּוֹב

‘Rabbi Papa says: the Paporanians know best how to explain this. And whom do I mean?—I mean Rabbi Aḥa bar Jacob.’—Now, Rabbi Aḥa came from a place called Papania.

This statement is repeated in Kiddushin 35a, where it is attributed to Raba (רבה). And this is most likely the true reading. For, as we know from B. Kamma 40a, Raba was a great admirer of the learning of Rabbi Aḥa bar Jacob. No doubt the letters ש in the word סותים led the scribe to attribute the saying to Rabbi Papa.

37. The same remark applies to the name Rabbi Ishmael, in Midrash Rabba, Esther, ch. 7.

אָרָו יִשְׁמָעֵל שְׁמוֹנַה תּוּרָא אָלָּחַו וּמֵאָוָה בְּרַ

The same passage recurs in Yalkut but anonymously. I doubt whether the name Ishmael is found elsewhere in the Midrash in connection with a haggadic statement. It was probably suggested by the initial letters of the three words שְׁמוֹנַה תּוּרָא אָלָּחַו which, when joined together, produce the name יִשְׁמָעֵל. The letter ש need not cause any difficulty when we recollect the derivation of the name
given in Gen. 16, 11. 'And thou shalt call his name Ishmael (God heareth) because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.'

38. There are also cases in which, it would seem, the process was reversed. The name of the sage induced the scribe to couch his saying in words in which the name might easily be recognized. An instance of this is given us in Midrash Rabba, Num., ch. 17.

ארֶעַ צְנַחֵת הַרְוֹת הַקָּרָשׁ וּב

The common phrase, in the Talmud, for expressing this saying, would have been: יִשְׂרָאֵל. And so we find it in all places where the subject is treated to which the statement of Rabbi Isaac refers: Midrash Rabba, Gen., ch. 35; Yalkut, Joshua, ch. 31, and Kings, ch. 193; Babylonian Talmud Moed Katon 9a; comp. Shabbat 30b. The two passages in Yalkut do not even contain the name of the sage. It is quite conceivable that a scribe, fond of paronomasia, seized the opportunity to remodel the saying of Rabbi Isaac, and to express it in words which reproduce the letters of his name.

39. Finally proceeding in the same direction, I think that in some cases the number of the ciphers, signified by the letters of an author's name, played an important part in the recording of his name and saying. An instance of this may be found in Midrash Rabba, Lev., ch. 16.

ר' אלシリーズ יבש רتجار ובו והם אחר רגר הגרו יברר תכי

Rabbi Jose ben Zimra is a well known personality in the haggadah. There is, moreover, often mention in the haggadah of the 248 members of the human body (Mishna Ohalot 18; comp. commentary of Rabbi Simson, ibidem). The passage quoted recurs in Midrash Yalkut, Kohelet, ch. 971. But there, ch. 878, on Ps. 120, the
words רֵם יְהוּדָאִים are omitted, just as in the Babylonian Talmud, Arakin 15b, where several other sayings of Rabbi Jose ben Zimra are recorded.

The inference is obvious. The letters of the name זִמְרָא are equivalent to the number 248. This made the scribe think of the term רֵמָי, and further induced him to let Rabbi Jose ben Zimra also express an opinion on the subject of the 248 members of the body.

This list of examples illustrating the use of paronomasia in Midrash and Talmud may be enriched by several others. The instances, selected by me, were taken indiscriminately from diverse passages. They suffice, I believe, to prove that the method of recording the names of sages, especially those in the haggadic writings, is not to be judged by a strictly historical standard, and that their sayings are not to be regarded as directly received from the lips of those to whom they are attributed.
THE SECULAR HEBREW POETRY OF ITALY

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CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF MOSES ḤAYYIM LUZZATTO.

The seventeenth century, as we have seen, was a period of transition. The poets of this period, though but few really deserve the name, are still vacillating between the old and the new, both in style, in versification, and in subject matter. But a great gain has been made in the development of poetry. The Hebrew, both in diction and in style, gradually assumes a more modern form; the new Italian versification introduced, gradually wins favor, and becomes firmly established; and the scope of poetry has widened. The eighteenth century sees the complete conquest of modernity. The Italian form of versification is the sine qua non of the poets, is taken as a matter of course, and the poetic tone becomes more and more secular. The religious feelings which inevitably manifest themselves, since these poets were all intensely religious, run as an undercurrent and not as the main stream. The number of poets also increases, though of many we have only isolated poems published, the greater bulk still remaining in manuscript. And during this century, we meet with truly gifted poets, men inspired, men who sang because they could not help singing, because their poetic souls demanded expression; and it is during this period that we come across the great,
consummate poetic genius in the person of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto.

During the first quarter of the eighteenth century, a number of minor poets continued the work of the seventeenth century poets in clearing the diction and freeing the style from the affectation and artificialities of mediaevalism. Eliezer Cohen of Leghorn, in his dramatic poem ייבא בני ישעיש עיניו ובנו written in 1680* shows a mastery of free versification. The argument of the poem in brief is this: A rich man glorying in the possession of his wealth meets a poor man equally glorying in his poverty. Each one tries to convince the other of the advantage he possesses, the rich man in the power of his wealth, the poor man in his freedom from care. The dispute waxes so heated that each draws his sword on the other, but the quarrel is settled by a third man who shows the strength and weakness of the position of each combatant and winds up by quoting Solomon’s prayer: Give me neither poverty nor riches. These thoughts, however, are couched in smoothly flowing rimes, the poet employing several forms of the Italian stanza as well as the rimed prose of mediaeval poets both of which make pleasant reading. Eliezer b. Gerson Hefez (Gentile)** whose two poems, a sonnet and a longer poem in terza rima, are extant (Kol ‘Ugab, Nos. 5, 11), possesses a fine style and a forcible and poetic diction. Samson Cohen Modon (1679—June 10, 1727,)* of Mantua, a member of a very prominent family, a man of

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* Kol ‘Ugab, No. 33.
** Possibly a brother of Moses b. Gerson Hefez (1664—Venice, 1712), the father of Gerson, the young author of Yad Hora’ah. See Neppi-Ghirondi, 239.
* Della Volta’s biography in Kerem Chemed, II; Steinschneider, C. B.; Jewish Encyclopedia, s. v.
wide education both secular and rabbinic, at one time connected with the Mantuan rabbinate though for the most part engaged in commerce, was a master of the sonnet. A moralist and given to the didactic, his Kół Musar (Mantua 1725), a collection of fifty sonnets, is an elegant and finished product, written as it is in a refreshingly fine Hebrew, and perfect in rime and rhythm. These sonnets are philosophic in character, and contain many keen reflections on things of deep human interest. One of his sonnets is addressed to Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (Introduction to his Psikḥot). (The Kół Musar is introduced by the congratulatory poems of David Finzi, rabbi of Mantua and father-in-law of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, and of Dr. Kalonynos d'Italia and Dr. Raphael Vita d'Italia.) Isaac Levi (אֵיֵי לֶוִי), a grandson of Leon da Modena and Venetian rabbi, composed a number of epitaphs which, however, lack the brilliancy of his famous grandfather. David Nieto (1654-1728), a native of Venice, who practised medicine and officiated as rabbi at Leghorn whence he was called to London in 1702 to become the Ḥakam of the Sephardic community, also tried his hand at verse-making and not unhappily. His poem of ten octaves (Kol ‘Ugab, No. 1), though somewhat hyperbolic in tone, betrays deep feelings, and is easy and graceful. The “Reflections” of Joseph Baruch b. Moses Cases, a younger contemporary of Zacuto, physician and rabbi at Mantua, are well written and contain some lyric touches. Fine are the lines:

Fleeter than an eagle’s flight
The days rush by and life is o’er;

*Dr. A. Berliner, Introduction to Leshot Aḥanim; Neppi-Ghirondi, pp. 165-76, where he is spoken of as a poet in a large sense.

*See Neppi-Ghirondi, 129, 254.
An instant, and life's bridge is spanned,
And, lo! we are no more.

(Kol 'Ugab, No. 32). The sonnets of Isaac Vita Cantarini (died 1723) and of his pupil Shabbethai Marini (died 1748), both physicians as well as rabbis of Padua, in honor of Abraham Cohen's Kehunnat Abraham, are graceful, though Cantarini's short poems contained in his Ṣeṭʿ (Amsterdam 1710) have no poetic value at all. Isaiah Bassani (d. 1739), teacher and staunch friend of Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, rabbi of Cento, Padua, and Reggio successively, while betraying no poetic depth of feeling, is a master of diction and of a clear, incisive style. His sonnet is finished, his octave is clever, and his elegy on Benjamin Cohen, his father-in-law (d. 1721), in sixty-nine terza rima stanzas is vigorous (Kol 'Ugab, Nos. 6, 14, 64). While

**This date is given by Neppi, p. 143. Ghirondi, quoting Isaac Pacisco, gives the date of his death as 1742, at the age of over ninety. Fürst, Bibl. Jud., s. v., gives the date of his birth as 1644; he was still living in 1718. Comp. his sonnet in Kehunnat Abraham, Venice 1719. He was an eminent physician sought after by the Italian nobility, as well as the head of the rabbinical college of Padua. He is the author also of Pi Sefarim (which I have not seen). His grandson Ḥayyim Moses Cantarini is likewise spoken of as a poet by Ghirondi who was in possession of his manuscript (Neppi-Ghirondi, p. 102, 238).**

**He translated Ovid's Metamorphoses into Hebrew octaves, the publication of which was interrupted by his death. His Snehim (34 Sonnets) and his rimed version of the Pirkei Avoi are still in manuscript. Fürst: Shabbetai Vita Maamim, Literaturblatt des Orientis, 1820, c. 124; Bibl. Jud., s. v.**

**Kol 'Ugab, No. 9; Neppi-Ghirondi, p. 154. M. H. Luzzatto in Lesokh Limmadim (Warsaw 1891, p. 78) quotes a few lines from an epithalamium written by Bassani in honor of Isaac b. Shabbethai Marini, and speaks of it in the highest term of praise.**

**He was a disciple of Zacuto, rabbi of Reggio, and teacher of M. H. Luzzatto. Abraham Kahana in his "Life of Luzzatto" (Hebrew, Warsaw 1898) asserts that Benjamin Cohen, an eminent kabbalist, a favorite disciple of Zacuto's, and himself a fervent poet, exerted a great influence upon Luzzatto both as a kabbalist and as a poet. I have not been able to obtain any of Benjamin Cohen's poems.**
the intrinsic poetic value of these men is not great, they emphasized the best elements of the poetic expression of the seventeenth century, and perfected the outer form of Hebrew poetry. The spirit of modernity which was thus struggling for realization was soon to find embodiment in the truly gifted Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto.

Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707-1747), a descendant of an old scholarly family, is the most tragic figure in the history of modern Hebrew poetry. A poet born, a man of splendid natural abilities, he received the most careful education which the wealth of his father, a rich silk merchant of Padua, could obtain for him. A precocious child, he mastered early Hebrew and Latin, the two languages which in Italy at that time, were the standards of Jewish and Christian culture respectively. The restless energy of his mind found expression already in his seventeenth year in a drama "Samson and the Philistines," of which only fragments are extant, and before he was twenty he had composed 150 Psalms in imitation of the Psalms of David. Both these works, written in a clear, pure, vigorous Biblical Hebrew, simple, direct, easy, and vivid, already foreshadowed the master. Had he followed his natural tendencies, had he devoted himself to the Hebrew muse for which he had been born, he would have been the most imposing figure in Hebrew literature, the Hebrew poet par excellence. Poetry, as his later productions proved, though written in the stress and storm of conflict and strife, was, with him, a part of his soul. There was little of the fit, and all of the nascitur in him. Moreover, it would have spared him the many persecutions, humiliations, and sorrows which rendered his life so tragic. Unfortunately, in 1727, he became possessed of a passion for mysticism, and a burning desire for the study of the
Kabbalah, in which he seems to have been encouraged by his teacher Isaiah Bassani, at that time rabbi at Padua. While his logical mind would under ordinary circumstances have easily seen through the hollowness of the thing, his great, poetic imagination proved his undoing. Fascinated by the glitter and charm of the Zohar, absorbing rather than discerning its mysteries, he mastered them so thoroughly, that he was enabled to write a "Second Zohar," a perfect imitation of the first in language and style, and surpassing it in logic (if logic and Kabbalah are compatible at all), for he endeavored to systematize the mystic teachings! His enthusiasm and poetic fervor soon led him beyond all bounds, in that he began to believe that he had a special guardian angel who appeared before him in nightly visions, and taught him the mystic sciences while a host of higher beings, among them patriarchs and saints, listened to his words of wisdom. Nor could his ardent soul keep such things to himself. A small circle of loyal disciples grouped themselves about him and listened spell-bound to his eloquent and glowing as well as erudite interpretation of the Kabbalah according to the new light he had received from his guardian angel. Carried away by his enthusiasm he even intimated to them that he himself was the Messiah! One of his disciples, Jekuthiel Gordon of Wilna who had come to Padua to study medicine, but fell under the magic of the Kabbalah as personified by Luzzatto, could not refrain himself from confiding to a kabbalist in Vienna and to Joshua Hōschel, rabbi of Wilna, in 1729, the wonderful powers of Luzzatto. The secret thus leaked out. From that time Luzzatto became the center of strife, contention, and persecution which terminated only with his life.
The tragic career of this remarkable man, resembling, as Graetz suggested, in his life that of Spinoza and in his death that of Judah Halevi, is too well known to need repetition. But crowded as his life was with many activities, among which the Kabbalah claimed the lion’s share, he nevertheless found opportunity to respond to the real call of his nature, to that of the muse; and this, it was, that saved him from oblivion. For, busy as a kabbalist, forcible as a moralist, and excellent as a rhetorician, his poetical works are his chief claim to distinction. His poetic spirit found expression in two dramatic poems, Migdal ‘Oz (Strong Tower) and La-Yesharim Tehillah (Praise for the Righteous), the former written about 1727, the latter in 1743.

While the dramatic form of poetry had already been introduced in Hebrew literature by Zacuto in his Yesod ‘Olam, Luzzatto’s Migdal ‘Oz is the first romantic drama in Hebrew literature. Luzzatto is the first to strike the keynote of true modernity in that his drama is not, like Zacuto’s, a mere pretext, a collection of rimes and sonnets loosely connected with a plot ready made in the midrashic interpretations of biblical texts. With Luzzatto the dramatic form is essential. For the first time in Hebrew literature he undertakes to depict that most intensely dramatic human passion—the passion of love. Hitherto the erotic theme had hardly been touched upon by Hebrew poets. The innate modesty of the Jew, and the sadness and uncertainty of the Jewish life in the Middle Ages, made the subject of love a thing profane. Even that most beautiful and most passionate biblical erotic idyll, the “Song of Songs”, has been interpreted by the rabbis as representing the alliance of God, the lover; with Israel, the bride. When a poet did
venture upon this subject, it was only incidental. Spanish poets, and especially Immanuel, early in the fourteenth century, sang of love, after the fashion of their time, but the ingenious licentiousness of the "Mahberet" with its riot of passion, levity, and frivolity was Italian rather than Jewish, and repelled rather than attracted. All through the middle ages, the somberness and seriousness of Jewish life reflected themselves in Hebrew poetry which was in consequence equally somber and serious. But this youth of twenty appeared, and, in an instant, as it were, cleared the atmosphere of the despair of the ages, and breathed into the Ghetto the spirit of love, the love of man for woman, of woman for man, with its sorrows and its joys! This innovation alone was sufficient to revolutionize the character of Hebrew poetry. It is this, above anything else, that stamps Luzzatto as modern. But not alone in manner, but also in matter did Luzzatto prove himself a pioneer, for he created an entirely new style of diction, of expression, of versification. To express real human emotions and human passions, biblical phraseology was altogether inadequate. Hitherto, writers, both in prose and verse, displayed their ingenuity by burying their thoughts beneath an ocean of ready-made biblical phrases, quoted bodily from the Bible and Talmud whether the entire quotation fitted into the context or not. To these were concatenated an endless chain of other complete phrases, with indefinite allusions to the sources quoted, thus forming a whole, ingenious beyond comparison, but puzzling, mystifying, hard to unravel. Scholars writing for scholars, only those thoroughly at home in biblical and rabbinical literature could fathom their meaning; and the style was admired in proportion to its ingenuity and complexity. Luzzatto's
depth of feeling and clearness of vision demanded a clear, incisive style; a free and lucid form of expression. His words, of course, are taken from the Bible, but pure as gold, without the dross of Aramaisms. His phrases are all of his own mintage; they represent his thoughts exactly, accurately. The resultant is an exceedingly graceful, pliable, smooth style, but vigorous and incisive withal. The blank verse which Luzzatto introduced in his drama, with longer and shorter lines of nine and six syllables respectively, is exceedingly rhythmic and musical, and flows softly like the tones of a harp, like the murmur of a brook.

The argument of the Migdal 'Oz written as an epithalamium is highly romantic. Ram, King of the land of the East, promises to give his daughter Salome in marriage to the man who would discover the entrance to a magnificent but inaccessible tower situated on the top of a lofty mountain near his capital. Unaware of this offer, a young foreign prince, Shalom, attracted by the mystery of the tower, explores it and effects an entrance through a secret gate which he leaves ajar. Ziphah, a worthless young fellow of Ram's capital, finding the gate open, enters the tower and then claims his bride from the king, which is granted, and the wedding-day is publicly announced. Meanwhile, Prince Shalom meets the princess and a passionate love springs up between them, though Salome would not prove false to her betrothed Ziphah whom she despises. Adah, the bosom friend of the princess, herself in love with Shalom, discovers the secret attachment and determines upon the ruin of the princess. She arranges a clandestine meeting between Shalom and Salome, hatches a plot against the life of Ziphah in the name of the princess, and then denounces her. The stern king, in accordance with law,
condemns his daughter to be burned, unless some one were to offer his life in her stead. Shalom offers himself in the princess' place, and confesses to having entered the secret tower which he thought was against the law of the land. Thereupon Shalom is recognized as the legitimate suitor for the hand of the princess, Adah confesses her intrigue, and everything ends happily.

Crude as is the conception of the plot, and feeble as is the dramatic action of Migdal 'Oz, it is nevertheless a finished work of art. The hero and the heroine as well as the other persons in the play, while they do not stand close scrutiny as character-drawings, are none the less living men and women. The passions that animate them are real, felt. Both Shalom and Salome are very young, very passionate, and given to ranting, but their monologues are crowded with beautiful thoughts and still more beautiful lines. The heroine is a type of womanly chastity and reserve, and the sentiment throughout the drama is lofty and elevated, chaste and pure, and thoroughly Jewish. The poet indulges in many observations which betray a keen insight into the affairs of practical life and a fine eye for the beauties of nature.

A few lines translated freely are here given by way of illustration:

"O let the rocks of thy majestic height
Whom I have taught to echo with her name
Tell of the sorrows of my heart;
O let each tree, a-murmur with the wind,
Tell of my grief. O let each bird a-wing
Across the eastern hills sing of the gloom
That gathered on my brow."

(Letteris' edition, p. 8).
The soul divine which born 'midst God's
Immense expanse, without a fence
To bound its vast immensity,
E'en though confined within a frame
Does loathe its narrowness; unused
To limit in its former home.

(ibid., p. 31).

The shepherd boy who feeds his flocks,
How happy is his lot!
The leader of his sheep, he walks,
Glad even in his poverty,
Secure within the shadow lies:
His heart and face both twins in joy!
All happy though so poor.
His spirit knows not lust of wealth,
Nor glory is his soul's desire;
Though thorns and thistles be his food,
His happiness does make them sweet.
Upon his wretched couch at night
He finds repose; the morning finds
The bloom of youth upon his cheek.
If wasted be the fields or full,
If black and stormy be the skies,
His heart is firm and troubles not.
He fears no ambush, nor does stand
In dread of perjured witnesses:
All happy though so poor!

(ibid., p. 43).

None can decipher, none can see
The heavens' hidden cryptogram;
Yet from between the reason’s rifts
The wise may gaze and catch a glimpse.
(ibid., p. 57).

The conceit of the echo responding to certain words
of the hero’s monologue, thus forming a cryptic sentence
of prophecy, is rather factitious from a modern point of
view. Luzzatto was very likely influenced by Zacuto
who introduced this device in his Tofte 'Aruk.
This, however, does not detract from the charm of the
poem. Taking into consideration the youth of the poet,
Migdal 'Oz stands as a fine work of poetic art, suggestive
of still greater possibilities in years of maturity.

La-Yesharim Tehillah (Praise to the Righteous),
modeled after Guarini’s Pastor Fido, and written in 1743,
represents the poet’s maturity both in thought and style.
It is an allegoric, symbolic drama describing the struggle
between right and wrong and the final triumph of the
right. While his earlier work is somewhat diffuse, and
lacking in depth, this drama is terse and philosophic. The
plot, if one may call it such with an almost total absence
of dramatic action, is feeble, as is the case with most
allegoric plays. Nor is the subject itself altogether new,
even in Hebrew literature (cf. Penso’s Tokeha yeveis).
But the beauty and perfection of its style, the music and rythm
of its meter, the profundity of thought, and the poetic
spirit that pervades every line, render it a masterpiece of
the highest rank. Published in 1743, it left its impress
upon all subsequent Hebrew literature, and deservedly
remains a classic to the present day.

The argument of the allegory is as follows: Truth
(Emet) the father of probity (Yosher), betrothed his son