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FOREWORD

The Jamie Lehmann Chair for *Piyyut* Studies and Research presents lovers of *Piyyut* with the first volume of *Piyyut in Tradition*, based on lectures at the First International Meeting organized by the Chair in 1993, as part of its extensive activities.

The articles in this volume reflect the broad scope of the topics subsumed under the heading of Poetry and *piyyut*, in respect of the periods, geographical regions and literary genres concerned. They have been arranged in chronological order of their subjects. On that basis, the first paper was written by **Aharon Mirsky**, who examines early stages in the development of post-biblical Hebrew poetry and delineates some of the main features of the book of Ben Sira, the Thanksgiving Psalms and the earliest liturgical poetry. Mirsky also traces ties between our ancient poetry and some of the Hebrew poetry of later generations.

R. Abraham ibn Ezra, in a celebrated passage of his commentary on *Koheleth*, described R. Saadya Gaon as a leading authority in every field. Saadya's importance as a harbinger of Hebrew poetry was pointed out long ago by Menahem Zulay, and Ezra Fleischer has continued to develop the theme. **Yosef Tobi** has edited the *Yozzer* poems of R. Saadya Gaon, adding an extensive introduction on Saadya's poetry and poetic theory. In the present volume Tobi defines Saadya Gaon as the first Jewish philosophical poet. He demonstrates Saadya's enormous prestige among the learned circles of Spanish and North African Jewry and describes him as the first Hebrew poet to write philosophical poetry, also incorporating well-known philosophical motifs from Arabic poetry, particularly that of Abu Al-'Atyah. Tobi's article draws parallels between Saadya's ideas in his philosophical work *Emunot ve-De'ot* and

some of his poetic works, thus revealing yet another aspect of the great sage's creative heritage.

The question of the correct reading of Spanish poetry with its unique meters deserves serious consideration, particularly as it has implications for those poems sung in the synagogue and the relationship between their melodies and meter. **Yehuda Ratzaby** has listened to recordings of Sephardic synagogal song and contributes an article in which he examines how the melodies correspond to the poetic meter, down to the smallest details.

Questions of form and pattern are represented in a paper by **Angel Sáenz Badillos**, who describes the development of sacred poetry as reflected in Solomon ibn Gabirol's and Judah Halevi's use of the Andalusian *muwassah* poem. Ibn Gabirol's sacred poetry presents many innovations, not least among them the use of the *muwassah*, although only five of his many liturgical poems actually follow all the rules of the form, while the other strophic poems cannot be considered 'pure' examples of *muwassah*. Not long after Ibn Gabirol, however, the *muwassah* became a popular form in sacred poetry, and Judah Halevi's works, for example, include no less than seventy-three sacred poems written in conformity with its strict rules. Although the form is represented in all genres, Judah Halevi made particularly frequent use of it in his *ahavah* poems.

Raymond Scheindlin, too, is concerned with a comparative study of the poetry of Ibn Gabirol and Judah Halevi, in particular with the relationship between the speaker and God in the two great poets' *Reshút* poems. In Ibn Gabirol's works of that genre, God is described as dwelling within man, who is therefore capable of reaching God through philosophical contemplation. In Judah Halevi's *Reshuyot*, however, God resides outside man and above him, sometimes revealing Himself to man in a state of religious tranquillity. For Ibn Gabirol, the idea of the human soul emanating from the Deity receives religious value – and that religious value determines the tone, style and metaphor of his poetic language; while Judah Halevi's *Reshut* poems show an awareness of the distance between God and man, citing the Revelation at Sinai and other major events of national significance as foci of religious activity.

Ephraim Hazan, in an article entitled "Israel versus the Nations in the Poetry of Judah Halevi and in *Sefer Ha-Kuzari*", considers

the reflection of Judah Halevi's philosophy in his poetry. The ideological encounter with the ruling religions and their outlooks, particularly with the problem of exile and the inferior political status of the Jews in the Middle Ages, moved Judah Halevi to formulate his doctrine of the spiritual superiority of Jewry despite its misfortunes. This doctrine is uppermost in Halevi's philosophical teachings, and the paper traces its predominant role in his poetical works in general. Many poems portray the Jewish nation in confrontation with the Gentiles as it voices its complaints and reactions. This is shown to be so central a feature of Judah Halevi's poetry that it may be used as a criterion in determining his authorship of certain doubtful poems.

Few academic chairs can claim to publish a major paper written by the person for whom they have been named. Included in this volume is an instructive article by the late **James H. Lehmann**, devoted to the literary and stylistic aspects of certain polemical works pertaining to the Maimonidean controversy. The author considers in particular the polemical poetry of Meshullam de Piera, a leading anti-Maimonist, pointing out the richness of thought and expression in his poems. Lehmann classifies da Piera's poetry as verse satire and examines it in the light of various aspects of the satirical style. An understanding of the satirical genre represented by these poems throws new light on da Piera's positions in the wake of Nahmanides' famous epistle.

Finally, a paper by **Binyamin Bar-Tikva** discusses the halakhic *piyyutim*, so many of which were written in the Catalonian center. He demonstrates how poems of the *Azharot* genre, shaped by halakhic and didactic principles, found ways to enliven their rather tedious pedagogical frames through biblical endings, which became an integral part of the structure of such *piyyutim*. These endings even betray a tendency to humor, using fragments of verses out of context and even with changed meanings. This technique, known as early as the time of R. Isaac of Barcelona, in time came to be frowned upon as unworthy of the serious attitude to religious law and the atmosphere that had developed among the disciples of Nahmanides.