

Yuval Evri

# Translating the Arab-Jewish Tradition

From al-Andalus to  
Palestine/Land of Israel

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## IMPRINT

Forum Transregionale Studien e. V. Berlin

*Essays of the Forum Transregionale Studien 1/2016*

Editorial Management: Stefanie Rentsch

Editorial Assistance and Typesetting: Jenny Meurer

Corporate Design: Plural | Severin Wucher, Berlin

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The Forum Transregionale Studien is sponsored by the Senate Department of Economy, Technology and Research of the land Berlin. In the area of internationalization and open access publications the Forum cooperates with the Max Weber Foundation – German Humanities Institutes Abroad. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) supports this cooperation.



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**Yuval Evri**

# **Translating the Arab-Jewish Tradition:**

From Al-Andalus to Palestine/Land of Israel

This essay investigates the vision of two Jewish scholars of a shared Arab-Jewish history at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The first part of the essay focuses on Abraham Shalom Yahuda's (1877-1951) re-examination of the Andalusian legacy in regard to the process of Jewish modernisation with respect to the symbolic and the actual return to the East. The second part of the essay centers on the work of Yosef Meyouhas (1863-1942), Yahuda's contemporary and life-long friend who translated a collection of Biblical stories from the Arab-Palestinian oral tradition, examining the significance of this work vis-à-vis the mainstream Zionist approach.

**Yuval Evri** studied Political Science and Cultural Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and completed his doctorate at Tel Aviv University in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. He was a 2013-2014 Fellow of EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE EAST—THE MIDDLE EAST IN EUROPE (EUME), a research program at the Forum Transregionale Studien, a guest researcher at Cambridge University (2010-2012) and a research fellow at the Van Leer Institute (2005-2010). Yuval Evri is a faculty member of the Mandel Leadership Institute and postdoctoral fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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# Translating the Arab-Jewish Tradition: From Al-Andalus to Palestine/Land of Israel<sup>1</sup>

## 1. A Dispute in Early Twentieth-Century Jerusalem

On a winter's evening late in 1920, in an auditorium close to Jerusalem's Damascus Gate ("bab al-'amud"), Professor Abraham Shalom Yahuda (1877-1951) gave a lecture attended by an audience of Muslim, Christian and Jewish Palestinian intellectuals and public figures.<sup>2</sup> Its subject matter was the glory days of Arabic culture in al-Andalus.

The event was organized and hosted by the Jerusalem City Council in honour of the newly appointed British High Commissioner Herbert Samuel (1870-1963). In his opening address, Mayor Raghib al-Nashashibi (1881-1951) introduced the speaker as a Jerusalemite, son of one of the most respected Jewish families in the city.<sup>3</sup> In his lecture, delivered in literary Arabic, Abraham Shalom Yahuda, since 1914 Professor of Jewish History and Literature and Arabic Culture at the University of Madrid, portrayed the golden era of Muslim Spain describing the great accomplishments of Muslims and Jews during this period in the fields of science, literature, philosophy, medicine and art and emphasizing the fruitful relations

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- 1 The essay is based upon a lecture that was held in the framework of the EUME Berliner Seminar on June, 25, 2014, and that marked the beginning of the EUME Workshop "The Possibilities of Arab-Jewish Thought" (June, 25-27, 2014 at the Forum Transregionale Studien). The author would like to thank Georges Khalil for his very helpful and insightful remarks to earlier drafts of the essay.
  - 2 The lecture took place on December 13, 1920 in a large cinema hall in Jerusalem, with more than 1,000 people in attendance.
  - 3 Raghib al-Nashashibi was born in Jerusalem to one of the most prominent Arab-Palestinian families in the city. He was appointed Mayor of Jerusalem by the British military authorities in 1920 after their dismissal of Musa Kazim al-Hussayni and served as mayor until 1934.

between them. This event was an important moment in the life of this scholar of Semitic culture, one in which his long-standing scientific and political projects merged.

From his early days in Jerusalem, and later on in Germany as a student in Heidelberg and as a lecturer at the Berlin “Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums” (1904-1914), Yahuda had focused on the Andalusian legacy, emphasising the historical and philological aspects of the Judeo-Muslim symbiosis during that period and its symbolic significance for the modernization and revitalization of Jewish and Hebrew culture. This issue was at the heart of Yahuda’s long-standing debate with Jewish scholars regarding the different options for Jewish modernization. Towards the end of his lecture, Yahuda addressed the Arab Palestinians in the audience directly. Speaking from the heart, albeit in a slightly pompous tone, he called on them to revive the legacy of al-Andalus:

If the opportunity exists today for the Arabs to return to their ancient Enlightenment, it has been made possible only by virtue of the empires that fought for the rights of suppressed peoples. If the Arabs revive their glorious past through the good will of these empires, especially that of Great Britain, which is willing to help them as much as possible, they have to return to their essence of generosity and allow the other suppressed peoples, including the People of Israel, to benefit from the national rights granted by the British Government. Only when the spirit of tolerance and freedom that prevailed in the golden age of Arab thought in al-Andalus [...] will return to prevail today, in a way that will enable all peoples, without religious or ethnic prejudice, to work together for the revival of enlightenment in the Eastern nations, each people according to its unique character and traditions, can an all-encompassing Eastern enlightenment be reborn that will include all Eastern nations and peoples.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Parts of Yahuda’s lecture were published in the Hebrew newspapers in Jerusalem. The section quoted here is from an article published in *Doar Hayom* two days after the event (A.A., 15.12.1920), translated by Yuval Evri.

Thus, Yahuda chose to end his lecture with a political statement regarding the future of Palestine in this new imperial era. Well aware of the importance of his words in such dramatic times, Yahuda proposed a symbolic return to al-Andalus as a potential political and cultural platform for Jews and Arabs in post-Ottoman Palestine. While it is hard not to see an affinity with the British Empire in his words, we should however note the unique context in which this lecture took place: a few months after the official beginning of British Mandatory rule in Palestine, at an occasion dedicated to the newly appointed High Commissioner Herbert Samuel and in his presence.<sup>5</sup>

However, the event also had a more specific historical context, as it took place on the same night that the third Arab National Congress opened in Haifa. The lecture was organized by Raghib al-Nashashibi in honour of Herbert Samuel, and Nashashibi invited Yahuda to give the main lecture. As the historian Safa Khulusi has suggested, this clash was probably not coincidental, but rather was part of the internal political struggle within the Arab Palestinian community.<sup>6</sup>

During the end of the Ottoman period, and more intensively throughout the British Mandate, the Palestinian political leadership was deeply divided between a few notable families. The rivalry between the two leading Jerusalemite families—the Nashashibis and the Husseinis—split the local leadership into two main camps: the national camp, under Haj Amin al-Husse-

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5 On the political and social transformation in Palestine during the early British Mandate, see Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011; Salim Tamari, *Mountain Against Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008; Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: the Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

6 Safa Khulusi, "Ma'ruf Al-Rusafi in Jerusalem", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22/23, 2005, 63-68.

ini, and the opposition camp, led by Raghīb al-Nashashībī. Both families drew supporters from other elite families and refused to cooperate with each other, resulting in a deep political divide in Palestinian society.<sup>7</sup> This split, which dominated the Palestinian political arena throughout the Mandatory period, had its origins in the early days of British rule, when Raghīb al-Nashashībī was appointed Mayor of Jerusalem after the British Military Commissioner removed Mūsā Kazīm al-Husseinī (1853-1934) from office.<sup>8</sup>

The three-day Arab congress in Haifa was organized by members of the al-Husseinī family and led by Kazīm al-Husseinī. Just a few months after the French army destroyed the short-lived constitutional Arab Kingdom of Syria under King Fayṣal (1885-1933), and amid the ruins of the first modern Arab state in *Bilād al-Sham* (Greater Syria) that projected equal citizenship to all, the participants in the Haifa congress sought to establish a new strategy towards British rule and towards the Balfour Declaration and the notion of a homeland for the Jewish people.

Khulūsī argues that the event in Jerusalem was organized by Nashashībī with the support of British officials as an attempt to weaken the effect of the Arab congress.<sup>9</sup> There are no solid indications that this was the case, but it is difficult to avoid noticing the link between the two events and the hidden political agendas that they embodied. The congress in Haifa represented

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7 On the political rivalry between the notable Palestinian families, see Muṣṭafā Badran, "The Palestinian Historiography of Family Leadership during the British Mandate", *Journal of Levantine Studies*, 4/1, 2014, 65-105; Khalīdī, *Palestinian Identity*, 1997.

8 Husseinī, who had nurtured his career in the Ottoman bureaucracy, had been Mayor of Jerusalem until he was unceremoniously removed by the British following the violence in the city that spring. He was replaced by Raghīb al-Nashashībī. Kimmerling, Baruch and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.

9 See Khulūsī, "Ma'ruf Al-Rusafi", 2005, 65.

a more critical approach towards the British authorities, while the event in Jerusalem was attended and supported by the British High Commissioner. Yahuda had arrived in Palestine just a few weeks before the event and most likely had no involvement in the organizing aspects or in the internal political dispute that surrounded it.

I will argue that, even in this complex political context, the fact that Yahuda decided to talk about the glory days of Arab culture and chose to deliver his lecture in Arabic and to address the Arab Palestinian intellectuals in the audience, was a cultural and a political statement for a different political approach. In contrast to the Balfour Declaration and its social and political implications for the Zionists vis-à-vis the Palestinians, Yahuda's lecture called upon the Arabs to revive their position as a majority, as they were in al-Andalus. Instead of minimizing and negating the Arab Palestinians' place in the new political structure, he asked them to take a leading role in shaping and determining the future of both Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

The event sparked a heated debate in the local Arabic newspapers after the famous Iraqi poet Ma'ruf al-Rusafi (1875–1945) published a poem about it. Rusafi, who served as an instructor at a local teacher training college, was in the audience. Inspired by Yahuda's lecture, he composed a poem in Arabic addressed to Herbert Samuel, in which he called for a return to the spirit of al-Andalus and for a revival of the historical connections between Jews and Arabs, while also emphasising the strong racial and cultural affinity between the two peoples:

Yahuda's speech made us all pensive  
And reminded us of what we knew so well.  
He celebrated Arab achievement in the West  
And recalled the glories of the Abbassids in the East.  
[...]

We are not, as we have been falsely accused,  
 Enemies of the Jews, overtly or in secret.  
 The two people are but cousins.  
 In their language is the proof  
 But we fear expulsion from the homeland  
 And being ruled by force of arms.<sup>10</sup>

The poem was published in several local Arabic newspapers and immediately received a very critical response from Arab poets and intellectuals.<sup>11</sup> The Lebanese-born Palestinian poet Wadi' al Bustani (1886-1954), who served in the British military administration as an interpreter, published a poem in reply to Rusafi:

Is it Yahuda's speech or wonders of magic?  
 Is it Rusafi's words or poetic lies?  
 By thy soul, I know not and maybe I do;  
 What pacing is it between Rusafi and the bridge?  
 [...]  
 Yea, he who crossed the River Jordan was our cousin  
 But we are suspicious of him who now comes by sea.  
 O Samuel! Are you really our old Samau'al?  
 And has England been subjugated by Banu Fihir?  
 Shall we believe in Balfour instead of Muhammad, Jesus,  
 Moses?<sup>12</sup>

Bustani emphasized the differences between the Jews in the Islamic tradition, whom Rusafi portrayed as cousins, and the new Jews who came to Palestine, by sea, with nationalist

10 Quoted in Khulusi, "Ma'ruf Al-Rusafi", 2005, 66.

11 For more details about Rusafi's articles regarding Yahuda's lecture, see Yehoshua Ben Hanania (=Yaacob Yehoshua), *Minha leabraham-sefer yovel li-khבוד abraham elmaleh* (The First Cultural Attache in Arab Countries Before the Foundation of Israel), Jerusalem: Ahva, 1959, 186-191.

12 On Bustani's contribution to Palestinian poetry and resistance to the British role in Palestine, see Khalid A. Sulaiman, *Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry*, London: Zed Books, 1984, 53.

aspirations. He used the similarities between the name of the Jewish High Commissioner—Samuel—and the Jewish poet and warrior Samuel ibn Adiya (Samau'al ibn Adiya) who lived in Arabia in the first half of the sixth century. Ibn Adiya is famous in the Arabic-Islamic tradition for his loyalty, as indicated by the well-known saying “more faithful than Samuel”. Bustani used the contrast between the mythical figure who for years symbolized strong connections between Jews and Arabs and the Jewish British pro-Zionist commissioner to demonstrate the differentiation between the Jew in the Islamic world and the Zionist Jew. Hasan Sidqi al-Dajani (1890-1938), a Jerusalemite literary and political figure and the editor of the *Al-Quds al-Sharif* newspaper, published an article on the event as well.<sup>13</sup> Like Bustani, he took a sceptical approach to Yahuda's lecture and his political motives. While complimenting Yahuda for his knowledgeable description of the cultural heritage of Muslim Spain, Dajani was suspicious of Yahuda's motives in praising the glorious Arabic past in al-Andalus. How can a Zionist speaker (as he labelled Yahuda), he wrote, encourage the Arabs to revive their glorious past and dominance, while the Zionists try to dispossess them of their homeland? The lecture, he continued, tried to flatter the Arabs but only rubbed salt in their wounds, and would not change their attitude towards the attempts of the Zionists to expel them from their land.

In an article published in his defence, Rusafi called on his fellow Arabs to differentiate between Judaism and Zionism, and to emphasize that they do not oppose Jews or Judaism in general, but only the political project being promoted by the Zionists.<sup>14</sup>

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13 *Al-Quds al-Sharif* was a bilingual newspaper in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic founded in 1903 in Jerusalem (Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 1997).

14 Rusafi's article was published in *Maarat al-Shark*, February 4, 1921.

Although the event received positive reactions in the local Hebrew newspapers, it was mostly ignored by the Zionist leadership, and in their inner circles Yahuda was criticized for his affinity to the Arabs and to Arabic culture.

At a time when national and social boundaries between Jews and Arabs in Palestine were hardening, there was little room for Yahuda's position. In Dajani's perspective, he was merely a Zionist speaker who supported the dominant trend of dispossessing the Palestinians of their land. Within Zionist leadership circles, he was criticized for promoting Jewish assimilation into Arabic culture. Instead of being the scene for a revitalized relationship between Jews and Arabs, Mandatory Palestine was the setting for the evolution of a bitter national struggle. Like so many other solutions, proposals, visions and dreams espoused during that dramatic period, Yahuda's vision for the revival of Arab-Jewish culture never materialized.<sup>15</sup>

This small chapter in Mandatory history can of course be viewed within the political and social context in which it occurred, with an emphasis on the formation of national and cultural boundary lines between Jews and Arabs during that period and from the perspectives of the national narratives that have dominated the political discourse since that time.

Here, I will read this event differently, using a new perspective that focuses on the broader intellectual and political project in which Yahuda was involved for many years, together

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15 The "lost" political options in Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century recently became a focus of historical and sociological research (Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*, 2011; Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brotherhood*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011; Jonathan Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014; Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor, *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writing on Identity, Politics, and Culture 1983-1958*, Boston: Brandeis, 2013; Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "The Possibility of Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41/1, 2014, 43-61).

with other intellectuals whom we can label today as “Arab-Jewish”.<sup>16</sup> Within this framework, I will investigate the special role that the “Andalusian legacy” played in the formation of that Arab-Jewish intellectual world at the complex intersection of the social, political and historical interests in early twentieth-century Palestine. More specifically, I will examine the role of the Andalusian legacy in the Jewish return to Palestine. Combining the symbolic return to al-Andalus with the actual return to Palestine, I will investigate the different political alternatives that emerged from it.

As will be shown later in the article, the connection between the return to the Andalusian heritage with the Jewish return to Palestine was not made randomly in Yahuda’s lecture in Jerusalem, but rather reflects a deeper perception of the bond between them.

Perhaps we should take a different starting point and note the crucial role played by the return to “al-Andalus” (or Muslim Spain) and “Palestine” as symbolic, real or imagined spaces in fin-de-siècle Jewish discourse. It would be hard to overstate the significance of these floating signifiers for the development of the modern Jewish discourse and the shaping of the political landscape in Palestine. They emerged as controversial ideas representing conflicting notions of time and space, disputing

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16 There has been a growing amount of research on the Mizrahi/Arab-Jewish identity and Mizrahi/Arab-Jewish thought over the last two decades. See Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims”, *Social Text* 19/20 (Autumn, 1988), 1-35; Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006; Lital Levy, “Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Mashriq”, *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98/4, 2008, 452-469; Behar and Ben-Dor, *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought*, 2013.

claims of ownership of narratives and territories, and marking different cultural and intellectual continuities.<sup>17</sup>

Within this context, this essay will examine two political and cultural options that Arab-Jewish intellectuals offered for a Jewish return to Palestine based on the “Andalusian legacy”. I will trace these options as part of a larger Mizrahi/Arab-Jewish intellectual project that emerged in the Palestine of the turn of the twentieth-century and that has been neglected in the literature surveying the period as well as in the official historical narratives.

The first part of the essay will focus on Abraham Shalom Yahuda’s cultural vision, re-examining his long dispute with European-Jewish scholars and political leaders regarding the process of Jewish modernisation with respect to the symbolic and actual return to the East. It will examine the dispute in two places: Europe and Palestine. While in Europe the dispute evolved around the emergence of the “Jewish question” and the development of the “Wissenschaft des Judentums” (science of Judaism), in Palestine it evolved around the “Arab Question” and the relations between Jews and Arabs.

The second part of the essay will focus on the work of Yosef Meyouhas (1863-1942), Yahuda’s contemporary and lifelong friend who translated a collection of Biblical stories from the Arab-Palestinian oral tradition, examining the political significance of this work vis-à-vis the mainstream Zionist approach.

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17 On conflicting representations of the Zionist return to Palestine, see Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory: Some Reflections on the Zionist Notion of History and Return”, *Journal of Levantine Studies* 3/2, 2013, 37-70.

## 2. Abraham Shalom Yahuda's Andalusian Legacy: From Jerusalem to Madrid via Berlin

Abraham Shalom Yahuda was born in 1877 in Jerusalem to a Jewish family of Iraqi and German origin.<sup>18</sup> Arabic was spoken at home and he began his systematic training in the language at a young age. He studied under his older brother, Isaac Ezekiel Yahuda (1863-1941), author of a comprehensive collection of Arabic proverbs.<sup>19</sup> By the time he left for Europe, he had already published two books and several articles about the connection between Arabic literature and poetry to Jewish and Hebrew culture. In Germany he took Semitic Studies at Heidelberg and Frankfurt Universities, and he attended the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. He wrote his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of the great German orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) at Strasbourg University, and his doctoral thesis was a German commentary on Rabenu Ba'hiya's "Hovoth Ha-Levavot".<sup>20</sup> From 1904 to 1914, Yahuda lectured at the Berlin "Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums" (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies) and from then to 1920 was Professor at the University of Madrid.<sup>21</sup> Yahuda travelled to Jerusalem at

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18 On Yahuda's biography, see Meir Plessner, "Yahuda, Abraham Shalom (1877-1951)", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 21, 272; Evyn Kropf, "The Yemeni manuscripts of the Yahuda Collection at the University of Michigan: Provenance and Acquisition", *Chroniques du manuscrit au Yémen* 13 (janvier 2012).

19 Isaac Ezekiel Yahuda was 13 years his brother's senior and an accomplished Arabist. He translated and edited several volumes of Arabic-Hebrew proverbs and poetry.

20 His dissertation was published in German: *Prolegomena zu einer erstmaligen Herausgabe des Kitab al-hidaja 'ila fara'id al-qulub [Hovot ha-levavot] von Bachja ibn Josef ibn Paquda aus dem 'Andalus, nebst einer grösseren Textbeilage*, Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1904.

21 During this period, he associated with King Alfonso XIII, who was impressed by Yahuda's scientific work. Yahuda used this unique connection to convince the king to personally intervene in the situation of the Jews in Palestine during World War I.

the end of 1920 to begin preparations for his return to Palestine, after receiving an offer of an academic position from the founding committee of the Hebrew University. But just a few months later, at the beginning of 1921, Yahuda left Jerusalem, disappointed with the Zionist political leadership and their strategy towards the Arab question, having decided to reject the offer of a professorship at the Hebrew University, and returned to Europe. He spent the following twenty years travelling in search of rare manuscripts and acquired a valuable collection of books and manuscripts, while also lecturing at different academic institutes in Germany and England. In 1942, he moved to New York and became a professor at the New School for Social Research, where he remained until his death in 1951.

Growing up in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century, Yahuda was exposed to the vibrant intellectual life that emerged in that period: the new Ottomanised intellectual elite, Arab intellectual circles and the al-Nahda movement; the Hebrew Haskala circles; and European scholars and researchers who settled in Palestine.

From this complex and diverse intellectual world he developed his unique approach towards the connection between East and West and between Jewish modernisation and Arab culture. In particular, this was the source for the role he sought for the Sephardic legacy within modern Jewish discourse, in contrast to the mainstream Jewish thought of his time.

The connection between Arabic and Islamic traditions to the Jewish tradition was at the centre of his extensive scientific work. Yahuda was trained in Semitic Studies and published dozen of articles and books on the subject, emphasising the Islamic influence on Jewish thought and culture. He had a special affinity to the Andalusian legacy, seeing it as a scientific and cultural model. In his private letters and memoirs, he described

the significant influence that the Andalusian intellectual legacy had on his intellectual life.<sup>22</sup>

This approach was partly influenced by his affiliation with the Orientalist community in Germany, especially the scholarly circles that emphasised the connections between Islam and Judaism. Yahuda was directly and indirectly influenced by the work of other Jewish scholars and orientalists such as Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), Gustav Weil (1808-1889) and Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907).<sup>23</sup> The great Islamic scholar Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) was the figure most influential on the young Yahuda and guided him through his first years in the academic world.

In one of his earlier articles while studying in Germany, Yahuda articulated his main criticism of the trend in Jewish scientific discourse to negate the Arabic aspects of the Andalusian legacy:

[...] if many were the Sephardic Jews who enriched our Hebrew literature with their respected work, their poetry and prose, so were there many Sephardic Jews who enriched the Arabic literary world, whose praise will forever be sung by those who will recount its history in Spain. But these latter did not catch our researchers' attention as did the former; as for them, they did not perform their work in our field, but rather sowed in foreign fields, and for this reason they will not be recounted in our literature's history.<sup>24</sup>

It is no coincidence that Yahuda chose the "Andalusian legacy" as the main conduit through which to articulate his criti-

22 Yahuda describes his affinity to the Andalusian heritage in his collected essays *Ever ve Arav*, published in New York, 1946.

23 On the German-Jewish scholarship on Islam, see Susannah Heschel, "German-Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool of De-Orientalization", *New German Critique* 117, Fall 2012, 91-117.

24 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "Our Rabbi Sa'adiyah Ga'on and the Arabic Environment", in *Ever va-Arav: osef mehkarim u-mamrim*, New York: Ogen, 1946, 70-88, translated by Yuval Evri.

cism of Jewish scholars. From the earliest stages of the Jewish enlightenment movement in Europe, the cultural and intellectual world of Muslim Iberia had been a subject of fascination and inspiration. Concerned by the emergence of the "Jewish Question" in Europe, Jewish scholars held up the Jewish "Golden Era" in Spain as a model for a universal, rational and secular Jewish culture and as a pre-modern indication of the Jewish affinity to the Western spirit.<sup>25</sup>

This process increased during the turn of the twentieth century as part of the development of the "Wissenschaft des Judentums" (science of Judaism) in Europe. A growing number of scientific works were published by Jewish scholars on the Jewish history, poetry and philosophy of medieval Spain. In their research, these scholars focused mainly on the Jewish and Hebrew aspects of that period, neglecting the huge role played by the Arabic and Islamic traditions. Despite the fact that many of the Jewish writings of that period were originally composed in Arabic or Judeo-Arabic, some of the scholars working on the period were not qualified in the language.<sup>26</sup>

In his strongly articulate critique of the scientific approach that shaped the work of the "Science of Judaism" circles, Yahuda emphasised the importance of the Arabic language. In their treatment of material from "al-Andalus", he claimed, these scholars ignored the prominent role that the Arabic language had played in that heritage. Without understanding this, one could not fully grasp the whole picture. As he explains in one of his articles:

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25 Ismar Schorsch describes this fascination of the Jewish-German intellectual with the Sephardic legacy as the period of "Sephardic Supremacy"; Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy", in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34/1, 1989, 47-66.

26 On the development of the research on Jewish poetry in medieval Spain, see Yosef Tobi, *Proximity and Distance: Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetry*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Our authors (the Jewish scholars) are prejudiced against our Arabic literary heritage from the Middle Ages. No one would dare to write about Philo without knowing Greek, or about Spinoza without Latin, or about Mendelsohn without German. But, except for a select few, nearly all who write about our medieval literature take no interest in studying the language that gave them most of their methods and ideas. Even with regard to their Arabic books, most of them are satisfied with understanding them using the Hebrew translations, which in themselves are influenced by the Arabic language and cannot be fully comprehended without knowledge of Arabic.<sup>27</sup>

Even though Yahuda composes his critique as a scholar with scientific authority, it exceeds the limits of scientific discourse. In it, he writes of the ideological motives behind the discourse of the Jewish scholars. In a private letter sent in 1899 to his cousin, David Yellin (1863-1941), Yahuda argued that the European Jewish scholars were trying to forcibly transfer Judaism into the tradition of Western civilization, against its true nature:

Truly, more than our literature needs Europe-ism it needs Easternism. I am so upset when I see these authors among us who wish to bestow upon us ideas that are foreign to the spirit of the Israeli nation, which is essentially Eastern. If these people only knew our Eastern literature and recognised our Eastern culture that developed with our prophets, then they wouldn't turn to the new, Western, Aryan European culture, so strange to our cultural spirit. Our Eastern culture was the fruit of human emotion [...]<sup>28</sup>

Yahuda points out the ways Jewish scholars used scientific discourse to redesign Jewish culture as part of Western culture by disassociating it from its Eastern roots.

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27 Yahuda, *Ever va-Arav*, 1946, 73, translated by Yuval Evri.

28 A.S. Yahuda, "Letter to David Yellin", October 1899. NLI- Personal Archives Yah. Ms. Var. 38 (L), translated by Yuval Evri.

He expressed similar concerns regarding the attitude of the Zionist leaders towards the Arabs and Arabic culture. During his first personal meeting with Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) in London in 1896, Yahuda advised him to approach the local Arab community in Palestine directly and to try to secure their support for the Zionist plan. Even at that early moment in the development of the Zionist project, Yahuda understood the major impact that the Arabs would have on Jewish plans to return to Palestine. During their second meeting, at the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Yahuda again raised the issue of the Arab leaders and urged Herzl to formulate a special strategy in this direction. In his memoirs, written many years later, Yahuda described how he was disappointed by Herzl's dismissive response to his plea; the latter argued that he was planning to turn directly to the superpowers, and that there was no need to deal directly with the Arabs.<sup>29</sup> Yahuda saw this event as another example of the arrogant attitude that the European Jews had towards Arabs, which had a crucial effect on the creation of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. One can identify the traces of the "Andalusian perspective" in Yahuda's political agenda for the Zionist plan for the Jewish return to Palestine. He emphasised the importance of involving the Arab majority in the process, and criticised the Zionist leaders who came from Europe for their arrogant attitude towards the Arabs.

Another reflection of Yahuda's Andalusian project can be found in his scientific work. In his research we can see a logic similar to the one used by the scholars he criticised.

One of his major scientific works was an edition of *al-Hidaya* ("The proper guidance to the religious duties of the heart") transliterated from the Arabic and published in 1912. Authored

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29 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "Herzl's Attitude towards the Arab Question", *Hed ha-Mizrah* 10, 1949, 10-11.

by the eleventh-century Andalusian Jewish thinker Bahaya ibn Baquda, the fame of the *al-Hidaya* lies in its fine quality as one of the earliest systematic works on ethics and spirituality in the Jewish tradition, as well as its strong connection with Islamic literature. The original book was written in Judeo-Arabic and was translated into Hebrew by Judah ibn Tibbon soon after its completion. In his modern edition, Yahuda returned to the original Judeo-Arabic manuscript rather than the Hebrew translation. He also added a significant introduction about the Arabic and Islamic sources used by ibn Baquda, emphasising the strong Islamic influence on this canonical Jewish text. Yahuda transliterated it into Arabic in order, as he says in the introduction, to make the work accessible also to modern Muslim scholars of the Orient.<sup>30</sup> In his review of the book published in 1917, Henry Malter pointed out that Yahuda's unique scholarly background played a crucial role in his work on the *Hidaya*:

A proper understanding of Bahya's Ethics, therefore, necessarily requires the most intimate knowledge of the classic Arabic literature in its various branches, as of the so-called *Adab*, *Kalam*, *Zuhd* and especially the broader *Hadit* and *Sufi* literature. This being the case, we must consider it good fortune that our work came into the hands of an editor who, better than any one of the younger European Arabists, satisfies the requirements just described. Born and brought up in the Orient, with Arabic as his native tongue and ancient Hebrew and Muslim literature as the main sources of his education, later broadened by studies at European universities, Dr. Yahuda was exceptionally fitted for the edition of Bahya's work.<sup>31</sup>

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30 For more information about Yahuda's book, see Henry Malter, "Yahuda's Edition of Bahya's Duties of the Heart", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 7/3, 1917, 379-391.

31 Malter, "Yahuda's Edition", 1917, 380-381.

Malter points out the link between the Islamic aspects of Bahya's work and Yahuda's unique scholarly world, especially his personal background and connections to the Arab world.

We can find the same approach in Yahuda's other works on the Arab-Jewish intellectual legacy from medieval times. In his articles on Saadia Gaon, for instance, he emphasised the influence that the Arabic environment had on the latter's work.

One cannot avoid noticing the contrast between Yahuda's approach to the Andalusian legacy and that of mainstream Jewish scholars, nor the different implications they held for the revitalisation of Jewish culture. Instead of attempting to modernise Judaism through association with the West, Yahuda proposed an almost opposite course: reconnecting Judaism to the East and to the Judeo-Muslim tradition. He saw this reconnection as part of a wider Eastern enlightenment process that could be shared by Jews and Arabs alike. In his writings, Yahuda linked the return to the Arabic literature of al-Andalus with the revival of Hebrew culture and with the Jewish return to Palestine. Yahuda started to articulate this political and cultural vision in his earliest days in Europe. As he wrote to David Yellin in a letter in 1899:

[...] but in the land of Israel it is possible [...] then, they (the European Jews) will return to their Easternism in the East, and open their hearts to Eastern and Arabic literatures. And by doing so, they will shed light on the life of our people in the past, before they changed their nature from the East and became too close to foreign people alien to their spirit [...] but the people of the East left us many books and scriptures that may give us an idea of their way of life and their intellectual properties, and the vast Arabic literature will provide us with sufficient material for our needs.<sup>32</sup>

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32 A.S. Yahuda, "Letter to David Yellin", October 1899, translated by Yuval Evri.

In Yahuda's vision for Jewish modernisation by returning to the East, one can find similarities to the lecture he delivered in Jerusalem, mentioned in the beginning of this paper.

Indeed, we can trace the "Andalusian perspective" through Yahuda's movement in time and space, from the turn of the twentieth century in Europe to Palestine of the early British Mandate. By doing so, we can find connections between Yahuda's proposal to the Arab Palestinians in his Jerusalem lecture to lead a joint Eastern modernisation and the model for Jewish modernisation that he proposed to the Jewish scholars in Europe.

With a deep understanding of the huge potential inherent in this moment for the future of Palestine, Yahuda planned his return (from Spain!) to Jerusalem so that he could play a meaningful role in the public sphere as a man of science and in forging political and cultural connections between Jews and Arabs. This was the moment he had been waiting for, for more than twenty years, since his departure from Jerusalem for his studies in Europe. But due to political and personal considerations, the professorship promised to him by the newly established Hebrew University met with opposition from the leaders of the Zionist movement. In February 1921, just a few months after his lecture in Jerusalem, Yahuda decided to cancel his plans and to return to Europe. Many years later, Yahuda described his disappointment, both personal and political, with the Zionist leadership, and especially with Dr. Weizmann:

My disappointments grew steadily, and it was during the London Conference in 1920 that I became convinced that Dr. Weizmann's policy would undermine our hopes and destroy our chances. I did not make any secret of my convictions; and on many occasions I expressed my misgivings and castigated him for his weakness in handling the elements hostile to us in the Colonial Office and for ignoring the necessity of cultivating Arab-Jewish relations, at a time when the atmosphere was pro-

pitious. This fact was enough for Dr. Weizmann to adopt a vindictive attitude towards me.<sup>33</sup>

After his return to Europe, and during the last decades of his life, Yahuda distanced himself from the Zionist movement in Europe and in Palestine. He occasionally expressed critical views of the political developments in Palestine and of the political strategies adopted by the leaders of the Zionist movement towards the Arab question.

### **3. Yosef Meyouhas's Biblical Stories from the Palestinian Oral Tradition**

Yosef Meyouhas (1868-1942) was one of the distinguished guests at Yahuda's lecture on that wintry night in Jerusalem. During the last years of the Ottoman era, he had held a prominent position in political circles in the city and served for some years as the representative of the Jewish community on the Jerusalem City Council.<sup>34</sup> A decade older than Yahuda, Meyouhas was born and raised in a similar cultural and social environment. He was a close friend and colleague of Yahuda's elder brother Isaac and of Yahuda's cousin David Yellin (1863-1942). He was an educator, translator and public figure, a member of the local intellectual circle that had a great impact on Yahuda during his formational years in Jerusalem.

The changes and modernisation processes that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Em-

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33 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, *Dr. Weizmann's Errors on Trial: A Refutation of His Statements in "Trial and Error" Concerning My Activity for Zionism During My Professorship at Madrid University*, New York: E.R. Yahuda, 1951, 5-6.

34 Yosef Meyouhas served as the representative of the Jewish community on the Jerusalem Council from 1914-1920.

pire, and in Palestine and Jerusalem in particular, shaped the unique intellectual atmosphere in which Meyouhas emerged. He was a prominent figure in the Hebrew revival circle in Jerusalem and took part in the formation of several key institutions at the end of the nineteenth century: the first Hebrew language committee (together with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda); the Hebrew teachers' association; the Jewish National Library; and the Jerusalem B'nai B'rith lodge.

Besides his public activities within the Jewish community, Meyouhas was also involved in the growing modern scholarly interest in ancient and contemporary Palestine. Institutions such as the British Palestine Exploration Fund, the Deutscher Palästinaverein and the American Palestine Exploration Society conducted systematic studies of Palestine and published the fruits of their research in scholarly periodicals and books.<sup>35</sup> Together with growing circles of local scholars, Meyouhas was engaged in ethnographic research on the life and culture of the local Palestinian community. This scholarly circle, which Salim Tamari describes as “nativist ethnography”, comprised mainly Muslims and Christians from the Arab Palestinian community, figures such as Dr. Tawfiq Canaan, Stephan Hanna Stephan and Khalil Totah.<sup>36</sup>

Like these Arab Palestinian intellectuals of his generation, Meyouhas was part of the urban and intellectual transformation that took place in fin-de-siècle Jerusalem.<sup>37</sup> He was exposed to the mixture of imperial, religious and nationalist

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35 The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) was founded under the royal patronage of Queen Victoria in 1865 by a group of distinguished academics and clergymen. The original mission statement of the PEF was to promote research on the archaeology and history of biblical Palestine.

36 On the definition of nativist ethnography and on the Tawfiq Canaan circle see Tamari, *Mountain Against Sea*, 2008, 95-98.

37 On the intellectual circles in Jerusalem at the turn of the twentieth century, see Tamari, *Mountain Against Sea*, 2008, 93-113.

discourses that filled the public sphere and became aware of the fluidity among them. This notion of fluidity and mobility among different national and collective affiliations shaped his political and cultural visions.

In addition to the vibrant intellectual atmosphere in Jerusalem, Meyouhas's own biography and multifaceted identity played formative roles in the development of his political and cultural activities. He was born in 1868 to a well-established Sephardic family in the Old City of Jerusalem. When he was five years old, his family moved outside the Old City walls to the nearby village of Silwan, becoming the first Jewish family in the village. His father died unexpectedly a short time afterwards, and his mother stayed in the village with her four small children. Meyouhas often described how their Muslim neighbours supported his mother during that crucial time and welcomed the family into the community.

In his writings, Meyouhas frequently returned to his childhood in Silwan and emphasised the great influence it had on his subsequent life and on his political and intellectual development. He described his close relations with his Muslim neighbours and how he used to spend long hours in their houses and was exposed to their stories, songs, music and traditions until these became an integral part of his kinship culture. His special connection to Arab Palestinian culture played a critical role in the formation of his cultural and political project, and in particular the translation of biblical tales from the Palestinian oral tradition.

In this context of cultural and social fluidity it is not surprising that translation (in the wider sense of the word) was very dominant in Meyouhas's intellectual and political life.<sup>38</sup> In a pe-

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38 Here I draw upon the rich scholarly literature published in the last two decades on the different uses of "translation" as an analytical concept in different theoretical contexts beyond the boundaries of the literary field, such as

riod of intellectual activity spanning more than five decades (from the 1890s to the middle of the twentieth century), Meyouhas translated a significant corpus of texts into Hebrew from several languages, but mainly from Arabic. He gave special attention to his translation work from Arabic, emphasising its political and cultural importance for the modernisation of Jewish life and culture in Palestine.

The prominent role of translation in Meyouhas's intellectual work was largely the result of direct and indirect affiliation with the Judeo-Muslim legacy from Medieval Spain. The Jewish scholars from al-Andalus were inspirational models for him, especially in terms of the prominent place of translation in their world. By adapting this intellectual model to the Palestinian context at the turn of the twentieth century, Meyouhas used translation from Arabic as a fundamental tool in the project of reviving Hebrew culture in modern Palestine. His translations of Palestinian oral culture into Hebrew were part of a wider project that emphasised the historical and cultural connections between Jews and Arab Palestinians as a platform for shared life in the future.

At the end of 1927, Meyouhas published a translated collection of biblical stories from the Arab Palestinian oral tradition. The collection was published at another crucial moment in the history of Palestine: the end of the first decade of British control and a time of growing political tension between Jews and Arabs. At this juncture, national, cultural and social boundaries were being formulated in the political sphere, separating

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anthropology, cultural studies and sociology. See Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, New York: Routledge, 1995; Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2004; Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002; Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Jews from Arabs, Hebrew from Arabic, and Zionists from Palestinians. Thus, just when Meyouhas published his translation of the Palestinian biblical tales into Hebrew, it seemed that his vision for Jewish and Arab Palestinian coexistence was fading and his position in the political sphere was becoming increasingly marginalised. In this moment of marginalisation, Meyouhas published one of his most important and most politicised works of translation.

Meyouhas's "Yaldei Arav" comprises 47 biblical tales from the Arab Palestinian oral tradition translated into Hebrew. The tales are divided into two parts: Torah stories (from the Pentateuch); and stories from the books of the prophets. The translated stories do not reference a specific author or an "original" source. Since there is no original with which to compare the translation, it is impossible to define a strict line separating the translation from the source. Meyouhas's special position towards the Palestinian tradition makes it even more difficult to demarcate that line, as well as the line between the translator and the author; it is hard to gauge the extent to which the text is a translation loyal to a certain Palestinian oral tradition, or is a new literary creation inspired by it. This kind of unstable relation between original and translation is in fact unexceptional in the world of translation, as for example Samah Selim argues<sup>39</sup>, but may be unusual for a biblically-related text.

The political dimension of Meyouhas's translation work is related to the fundamental role that the biblical text played in Zionist discourse at the turn of the twentieth century. The biblical text was at the heart of Zionist political claims for ownership

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39 Samah Selim, "Nation and Translation in the Middle East", *The Translator* 15, 2009, 1-13. For further reading on the relation between the original text and the translation, see Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, 1995; Niranjana, *Sitting Translation*, 1993.

of the land.<sup>40</sup> Adopting the Bible as an original historical text gave justification for the return of the people of the Bible (the Jews) to their original homeland. This process was based on the principle of concentrating almost exclusively on the biblical text as a historical authority, while separating it from the vast array of Jewish traditional texts that followed it, particularly the rabbinical corpus: the “Midrash”, the “Talmud”, and halakha.

The positioning of the Bible as an ultimate authority was influenced by a secular Protestant understanding of the text, and was part of the modern revival—which emerged in America and Europe in the nineteenth century—of the Judeo-Christian interpretational tradition of the text and of the land.<sup>41</sup> At the heart of this notion was a connection between the historical ownership of the biblical text with the ownership of the Land of Israel, while eliminating the actual history of the land and of its people. While the majority of the Jews in historic Palestine accommodated this perspective, it effectively dissociated the Arab-Palestinians from the land.

Beshara Doumani describes this growing Judeo-Christian fascination with the Holy Land (historically and physically) which entirely ignored the people who lived in it:

[...] the lack of interest in the history of the people who lived on that land. The dominant genres at the time—travel guides and historical geography—focused primarily on the relationship between the physical features of Palestine and the biblical events

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40 Various aspects of the role of the biblical text in Zionist narrative and politics have been investigated in the literature. The political implication of that trend was discussed in: Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory, 2013; Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Palestine-Israel*, London: Zed Books, 2007; Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, London and New York: Verso, 2008.

41 See Raz-Krakotzkin, “Exile, History and the Nationalization of Jewish Memory”, 2013.

described in the Old and New Testaments [...] The amazing ability to discover the land without discovering its people dovetailed neatly with early Zionist visions. In the minds of many Europeans, especially Zionist Jews, Palestine was “empty” before the arrival of the first wave of Jewish settlers in 1881-84.<sup>42</sup>

In a recently-published article Lorenzo Kamel also described this phenomenon, and coined the phrase “Biblical Orientalism”<sup>43</sup>. Kamel shows how, in hundreds of books and travel diaries that were written about Palestine by Western authors, the local Arab population were portrayed as a “simple appendix to the ancient Biblical scenarios [...] as ‘shadows’ of the far-off past, ‘fossils’ suspended in time”<sup>44</sup>. This precise formulation, one should not forget, has been one of the primary means used to delegitimise Arab Palestinian claims to a homeland. Its more disturbing aspects, however, only appeared as history unfolded.

This new interpretation, or “translation”, of the Bible into the Zionist project contained a dual, and contradictory, perception of the Arab Palestinians, as people and as a symbolic image:

1. On the one hand, the biblical text served as a political tool to negate the Arab Palestinians’ historical and national “rights” to the land.
2. On the other, the Arab Palestinians (in particular the *fellahin*, peasants) were viewed as symbols of the “biblical Jews” and as mirror images of the Jewish new settlers in Palestine.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Beshara B. Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians in History”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21/2, 1992, 5-28, 8.

43 Lorenzo Kamel, “The Impact of ‘Biblical Orientalism’ in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Palestine”, *New Middle Eastern Studies* 4, 2014, 1-15.

44 Kamel, “The Impact of ‘Biblical Orientalism’”, 2014, 1.

45 On the representation of the Arab Palestinians as biblical Jews, see Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Ironically, then, the Arab Palestinians themselves were used to prove the originality and validity of the Jewish biblical myth, which helped the Zionists articulate their political rights to the land, and to justify the expansion of the Jewish settlement in Palestine.

It is possible to find links between Meyouhas's translation of the Palestinian biblical stories into Hebrew—which I will analyse below—and this Judeo-Christian Zionist trend I have just described. I will not argue that they have nothing in common, but I would choose to emphasise the significant differences between them. I would like to suggest three fundamental aspects that differentiate Meyouhas's work from the Zionist trend:

1. Meyouhas's unique position as an Arab Jew and a Palestinian native, who straddled the Jewish and Arab Palestinian traditions.
2. The blurred distinction between translation and original text, and between Hebrew and Arabic.
3. Meyouhas accesses the biblical text by reconnecting to Judeo-Muslim traditions based on oral tradition and interpretations, while the Judeo-Christian tradition is based on the original Hebrew source.

Throughout the long history of translations, loyalty to the original text stood at the centre of the translator's task. This was particularly evident in translations of religious texts (and the biblical text can be used as a paradigmatic case study), in which the question of loyalty to the original was particularly emphasised.<sup>46</sup> Translation work was perceived as a technical act of copying from

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46 For discussion of the tension between loyalty and betrayal in translation work, see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1923), in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings,

one language to another, and was valued according to its similarity to the original.

Critical theory, however, has taught us that every act of translation implies transformation and change and can never be a pure mimicry of the original source. As Walter Benjamin famously puts it: "no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original"<sup>47</sup>. If we accept Benjamin's assumption that translation is always an act of betrayal towards the original text, we can see the political potential of Meyouhas's translation work in an era that was obsessed with returning to the "originals".

The sense of betrayal has a more crucial role in the case of translating the biblical text in the context of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict. In this case, the primacy and stability of the "original" was critical in the struggle over the ownership of the land.

In Meyouhas's work, the fluidity that is inherent in the act of translation becomes a source of resistance to the dominant discourse, and offers inspiration for an alternative political approach. At a time when national and cultural boundaries were separating Jews and Arab-Palestinians, and when a struggle was raging over the question of the original people of the text and the land, Meyouhas's translation work proposed a different cultural and political vision, one which sought to undermine the question of originality. Instead of focusing on the stability and authority of one original source, Meyouhas emphasised the sense of fluidity and transformation embodied in the biblical text. And in contrast to the Zionist political trend, which used the biblical text as a tool to claim exclusive Jewish ownership of the land, he suggested a different idea: if there is no single au-

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Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, 256; Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, 1995; Ninajana, *Siting Translation*, 1995.

47 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1923), 1996, 256.

thorised source of the biblical text, but only translations, then no one can claim exclusive ownership of it or of the land.

Thus Meyouhas offers an alternative path for the Jewish return to the biblical text, as part of the process of shaping the national narrative: instead of reconnecting only to the original written text, we can locate the biblical text within its vast array of interpretations and translations in the written and oral traditions, Jewish as well as Muslim. This path, in turn, necessitates that the Arab Palestinians and their history be included—in the text and in the land.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In concluding this article, I want to shift the focus to some current manifestations of the return to Palestine/Land of Israel in the Israeli public discourse, and to investigate what remains of the diverse and controversial debate that took place a century ago.

One example can be found in one of the most popular tourist sites in Israel: Ir David, the City of David, which is located in the heart of Silwan, an Arab Palestinian village. Hundreds of thousands of visitors attend the site every year; there were more than 400,000 visitors in 2012, including 80,000 school children. The “Ir David” foundation that manages the site supports the growing Jewish settlement in Silwan, containing 200 Jews who live in heavily-guarded homes, in separation from the village’s 40,000 Palestinian residents.

The foundation’s internet site reveals an absolute negation of the presence of the local Palestinian village and its inhabitants. The website refers solely to “the City of David” without even once mentioning the name of the place in which it is located: Silwan. It demonstrates how Israeli space (ancient Jeru-

salem in this case) is imagined in relation to the biblical text, intersecting different notions of time and space. In the case of Ir David, the visitors travel in time and space to the biblical city of David 3,000 years ago.<sup>48</sup>

The fact that the site has become such a popular place, gaining huge public support as well as financial support from the government (even though it is run by a private, right-wing NGO), indicates the extent to which the Protestant-Zionist conceptions of the Jewish return to the land are deeply embedded in Israel's contemporary political and social sphere.

The absence in the current political discourse of the Mizrahi/Arab-Jewish perspective, as represented by Yahuda and Meyouhas a century ago, is significant. The lack of Meyouhas's voice is even more significant in this specific case, in light of his special connection to Silwan, the village to which he moved as a young child with his family, and in which he spent most of his childhood. It was there that he was first acquainted with the biblical stories that he later translated, and which he published at a crucial moment when he could still imagine a different future for Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

However, in a more careful reading of the "Ir David" website I discovered this passage:

In 1873 the City of David began a Jewish era when the Meyuchas family made it their home. The decision to move there was for business reasons, as their business was hurt when the Old City would be locked every evening and opened only in the morning. This was the first Jewish settlement on the hill for hundreds of years, which had experienced a glorious Jewish past. With the aliyah of the Yemenites ten years later, in 1882, new olim from Yemen joined the Meyuchas family, settling in caves near the village of Silwan, opposite the City of David. In 1884, due to the involvement of generous Jews, a nice village

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48 <http://www.cityofdauid.org.il/en>

was established for the Yemenites opposite the City of David (on the Mount of Olives side), which was named the Shiloah Village. The Jewish village thrived and prospered, but was badly hurt in the 1929 pogroms. After recovering from the blow, the Jews returned to the Shiloah Village and deepened their control over it. Their incredible stubbornness didn't help them with the outbreak of the "Great Arab Revolt" in 1936. Over the course of two years, Arab residents of the area conspired against their Jewish neighbours, until they permanently abandoned it in 1938.<sup>49</sup>

Here, the narrative of Meyouhas's family is co-opted and used in the service of the new settlers in Silwan, who by doing so portray themselves as the heirs of his legacy and his property. A similar process is taking place in other areas in Israel/Palestine that in the past used to have Mizrahi/Arab-Jewish communities. Hebron is one such example: new settlers are reclaiming the historical ownership and legacy of the Arab-Jewish community that lived in the city for hundreds of years, until their tragic departure in 1929, in support of their efforts to build a Jewish settlement in the city.

In the absence of historical and scholarly research about the important intellectual legacy of people like Meyouhas and Yahuda, and other Sephardi/Arab-Jews from the beginning of the twentieth century, there will be more such cases of their legacy being used to justify actions and ideas that they opposed a century ago.

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Forum Transregionale Studien e.V.

Wallotstr. 14

14193 Berlin

T: +49 (30) 89001-430

F: +49 (30) 89001-440

office@trafo-berlin.de

The full text is published open access in

*Essays of the Forum Transregionale Studien* at

[www.perspectivia.net](http://www.perspectivia.net), the publication platform of the

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section at [www.forum-transregionale-studien.de](http://www.forum-transregionale-studien.de).

ISSN (Print) 2364-8945

ISSN (Online) 2364-8953

## **Essays of the Forum Transregionale Studien**

Herausgegeben vom Forum Transregionale Studien e.V., Berlin

Bd. 1/2016

**Yuval Evri:**

Translating the Arab-Jewish Tradition: From al-Andalus to  
Palestine/Land of Israel

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