

## **The *calembour* in Rabbi Raphael Aharon Monsonego's "Neot midbar"**

Tamar Lavi\*\*

Giv'at Washington Academic College for Education /  
Hemdat Hadarom Academic College for Education

---

EL CALAMBUR EN LA OBRA POÉTICA «NEOT MIDBAR» DE R. RAPHAEL AHARÓN MONSONEGO.— R. Raphael Aharon Monsonego fue un rabino marroquí que vivió entre los siglos XVIII y XIX. Su extensa obra literaria incluye textos religiosos de la Halajá, como también poemas que se caracterizan por el frecuente recurso a la técnica del calambur, por la cual hace referencia a versos bíblicos en un contexto diferente. El calambur es un artificio lingüístico, un tipo de alusión utilizada por poetas judíos del norte de África, que está basada en «el encuentro de dos textos, uno implícito (basado en la memoria y en la conciencia del lector) y otro explícito (por ejemplo, el texto aquí expuesto)». El calambur se caracteriza por el uso de pequeños cambios ortográficos o fonéticos en palabras y fragmentos que provocan cierto efecto humorístico y asociativo. Concretamente «el calambur toma una palabra o una frase de un texto bíblico o rabínico y la presenta con un mínimo cambio escrito o vocálico [...] creando así cierta agudeza lingüística que da un nuevo sentido a lo expresado». El lector, que reconocerá intuitivamente el texto original puesto que está vinculado con la literatura clásica judía basada en la Biblia y en la Halajá, podrá apreciar el juego de palabras, pese a los pequeños cambios anotados, disfrutar y valorar dichas agudezas. El objetivo de este artículo es examinar de diferentes formas el uso del calambur en la poética de Monsonego a través de varios ejemplos y especialmente analizar uno de sus textos en el que hace amplio uso de dicha técnica: «Im omar avo ha-'ir» ('Si decido alzar mi lamento').

PALABRAS CLAVE.— R. Raphael Aharon Monsonego; calambur; intertexto; pronunciación de vocales y consonantes hebreas; homónimos hebreos; homógrafos hebreos; ambigüedad; juegos de palabras.

---

\* I want to gratefully acknowledge financial support by Giv'at Washington Academic College.

\*\* lavitamar@gmail.com

Rabbi Raphael Aharon Monsonogo was a Moroccan rabbi who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. His literary creation is extensive, and apart from halachic texts he wrote a series of poems that are characterized by abundant use of the *calembour* technique. The *calembour* (in English, *pun*) is a specific type of allusion used by North African Jewish poets and writers. Like all allusions it is based on “a meeting of two texts, one implicit – i.e., in our consciousness and memory, and the other explicit – i.e., in the actual text in front of us.” A *calembour* differs from other types of allusions in that it consists of “phonetic and spelling changes in the words, idioms and fragmented verses in order to gain a humorous effect and other associative allusion.” Namely, in the *calembour* a word or phrase from a biblical or rabbinic text is presented “with a minimal change in letter or vowel etc. [...] creating a witticism or a new meaning.” The author assumes, then, that the reader is able to intuitively identify the original text despite the changes made and even enjoy and appreciate the linguistic witticism since he is well-versed in the Jewish sources (especially the Hebrew Bible and halachic literature). The aim of this paper is to examine the use of the *calembour* in Monsonogo’s poetry through several examples of its different forms and especially through the analysis of one of the poems that features a larger use of this technique: “Im omar avo ha-‘ir” (‘If I resolve to arouse lament’).

KEYWORDS: Rabbi Rafael Aharon Monsonogo; Calembour; Intertextuality; Consonant and Vowel Pronunciation; Literal Meaning of Nouns; Lexical Ambiguity; Metaphor; Union and Disassembly.

Rabbi Raphael Aaron Monsonogo was born in 1760 into a distinguished family in Fez, Morocco.<sup>1</sup> His father, Rabbi Yedidia Moshe, was one of the sages and religious judges of the city. Monsonogo studied at the rabbinical school of Rabbi Shaul Siriro, was ordained as a rabbi by Rabbi Eliyahu Ha-Sarfati, and was eventually elected to replace his father in the rabbinate. Rabbi Raphael was a preacher and posek (halachic decider), poet and writer. He was famous for his modesty and his warm dealings with the pu-

<sup>1</sup> Monsonogo is first mentioned in Y. BEN NAIM, *Malche Rabanan* (Jerusalem: Defus Maarav, 1931) p. 105b. Y. M. TOLEDANO (*Ner ha-Ma'arav* [Jerusalem: Sefardic Library, 1911] p. 195) includes him in his list of sages, while most of the information about him is given in the introduction to M. AMAR’s two books on Monsonogo: “Introduction to R. Refael Aharon Monsonogo’s *Me ha-Shiloah* and *Meshikhot levav*,” in *Me Hashiloah Recueil De Halacha* (Lod: Orot Yahdout Hamaghreb, 1992 [in Hebrew]) pp. 4-5, and “Introduction to R. Avraham Monsonogo’s *Shiyure mitsva*,” in *Chioure Mitsva commentaire sur la Hagada* (Lod: Orot Yahdout Hamaghreb, 1993 [in Hebrew]) p. 9. He is also mentioned in D. OVADYA, *Fas va-hakhameha*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1979) pp. 310-311. See also LAVI, *Poetical aspects of Neot Midbar* (Ph.D. dissertation, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2003).

blic. He was also known for his love for the Land of Israel, glad when it experienced peace and saddened in troubled times. Monsonego passed away on the Ninth of Av 1840 at the age of eighty. He was survived by four sons, great sages of Torah: R. Shelomo, R. Eliezer, R. Isaac and R. Yedidia.<sup>2</sup>

Monsonego wrote several works, including *Me Ha-Shiloah*, a monograph on the laws of divorce, and *Maskiyot Levav* – a broad commentary in Pardes style on Psalm 119 (both works were printed with the expansion of printing presses in Morocco).<sup>3</sup> He also left many unpublished sermons on the Jewish festivals and the weekly Torah readings. Because he was a famous halachic decider, sages from all over Morocco sent him halachic questions, and some of his decisions (*responsa*) were published in an appendix to his *Me Ha-Shiloah* and in books of contemporary sages (e.g., *Avne Shaish Responsa* by R. Shaul Abitbul).<sup>4</sup> In addition to halachic writing, Monsonego also wrote eighty-six poems and *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) and twenty-one rhymed epistles,<sup>5</sup> and these were preserved in the collection *Neot Midbar* ('Oases').<sup>6</sup>

R. Raphael used every appointed time and event of Jewish life with its special ritual as an opportunity to furnish it with a poem or a piyyut. Actually, his poetic oeuvre encompasses all four of the constant cycles of Jewish life: he wrote nine piyyutim – requests and supplications – for the prayer cycle, thirty-three poems and piyyutim for the annual cycle (Jewish festivals), twenty-three poems and laments for the life cycle – for the central events in the life of the Jew from birth to death, and twenty-one poems for the cycle of the individual and society, among them personal poems and poems of praise for great Torah sages. His piyyutim abound in epithets and allusions – many of them punning calembour allusions.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yedidia Monsonego, the youngest son, followed his father as chief rabbi of Moroccan Jewry.

<sup>3</sup> *Sefer Me Ha-Shiloah* (Casablanca, 1929); *Maskiyot Levav* (Fez, 1930); see AMAR, "Introduction to *Shiyure Mitsva*," p. 9, and AMAR, "Introduction to *Me ha-Shiloah*," p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> See AMAR, "Introduction to *Me ha-Shiloah*," p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> See R. HITIN-MASHIAH and T. LAVI *From Neot Midbar: Rhymed missives by R. Raphael Aaron Monsonego* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2010 [in Hebrew]).

<sup>6</sup> The manuscript is owned by Rabbi Moshe Amar. I am grateful to Rabbi Amar for graciously letting me have a photocopy and a transcription of the manuscript.

The calembour (in English, *pun*) is a specific type of allusion used by North African Jewish poets and writers. Like all allusions it is based on “a meeting of two texts, one implicit – i.e., in our consciousness and memory, and the other explicit – i.e., in the actual text in front of us.”<sup>7</sup> A calembour differs from other types of allusions in that it consists of “phonetic and spelling changes in the words, idioms and fragmented verses in order to gain a humorous effect and other associative allusion.”<sup>8</sup> Namely, in the calembour a word or phrase from a biblical or rabbinic text is presented “with a minimal change in letter or vowel etc. [...] creating a witticism or a new meaning.”<sup>9</sup> The author assumes, then, that the reader is able to intuitively identify the original text despite the changes made and even enjoy and appreciate the linguistic witticism since he is well-versed in the Jewish sources (especially the Hebrew Bible and halachic literature).

By its very nature the calembour device is intertextual, for it is based upon the encounter between two texts within a single literary work. The writer inserts words into the artistic text that include a hidden linguistic clarification yet are present in the consciousness of the reader who is knowledgeable in Jewish sources. The reader notices the slight change in the written word (made by the *payyetan*) and identifies it in the original text (the one that the reader is currently not facing). The connection between the explicit words and the hidden words yields a conceptual linkage between the two texts: the newly written text and the source. That is, inherent in every text is the potential to correspond with other texts within the reader’s realm of knowledge. Thus an intertextual discourse takes place, which adds another interpretation to what is being written, one that expands and extends the idea expressed by the actual text.

---

<sup>7</sup> Z. MALACHI, “Creating Humor?: Allusion to classical sources in Spanish-Hebrew humoristic literature,” *Mahut* 30 (2005) pp. 17-28: 19-20 [in Hebrew].

<sup>8</sup> Sh. SHARVIT, “Word play in the Responsa Literature,” in *Sefer Hadasa Kantor*, eds. O. SCHWARZWALD and Y. SCHLESINGER (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996 [in Hebrew]) pp. 238-250: 238; see also Sh. SHARVIT, “Linguistic humor in rabbinic literature,” in *Hebrew Language and Jewish Studies*, eds. A. BEN DAVID and Y. GLUSKA (Netanya: Ha-aguda letipuah hevra ve-tarbut, 2001 [in Hebrew]) pp. 245-258.

<sup>9</sup> M. NIZRI, “*The Crying Voice* by R. Rafael Moshe Albaz,” in *Masoret Ha-piyyut* 3, eds. B. BAR TIKVA and E. HAZAN (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002 [in Hebrew]) pp. 157-182: 167.

The Hebrew calembour originates in the *al tikra* (do not read) statements in the interpretations of *Hazal* (the sages) of Jewish law and Talmud. That is, one should not read what is written as it is, but rather should read it differently. This is one of the ways to learn Tanach – to read the verse as if it was written differently. For example, in writing about Genesis Chapter 3 “Rachel weeping for her children” Racanati wrote “do not read ‘Rachel’ but rather ‘the spirit of God.’” According to this exegesis it is the spirit of God that is weeping for her children. Lamentations 1:16 states: “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water; because the comforter is far from me, even he that should refresh my soul; my children are desolate, because the enemy hath prevailed.”

The Hebrew calembour was already used as an artistic poetic device during the Middle Ages in the secular Hebrew literature of Spain.<sup>10</sup> Evidence of the use of the calembour in epistolary Hebrew writings can be found in missives written in Europe from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> R. Yisrael Najara (1550-1625), who lived in Eretz Israel, also used calembours in his writings.<sup>12</sup> The sages of the East and of North Africa used the calembour technique widely in letters, introductions to books and missives to one another.<sup>13</sup> The writers usually marked the calembour with a *geresh* (apostrophe) or *gershayim* (double quotation marks).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See R. HITIN-MASHIAH and T. LAVI, “The calembour device in poetic condolence letters written by Moroccan sages: A comic means?,” *Pe’amim* 133-134 (2012-13) pp. 77-91: 80 [in Hebrew]; M. NIZRI, “Linguistic Jokes,” *Mayim Medalav* 22-23 (2011-12) pp. 124-151: 128-132 [in Hebrew].

<sup>11</sup> H. SHIRMAN (*The History of Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain and Southern France*. Edited, Annotated and Supplemented by Ezra Fleischer [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997 [in Hebrew]] p. 475) criticizes Avraham Ben Yitzhak Habadrashi (Provence, second half of the 13th century) due to his writing style which was influenced by “plays on words and games with letters.”

<sup>12</sup> See Y. NAJARA, *Mimei Yisrael. Machzor Zemirot Yisrael* (Venice, 1599-1600) pp. 137-168.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the use of calembour in texts that are not poetic, see SHARVIT, “Word play;” SHARVIT, “Linguistic humour;” NIZRI, “*The Crying Voice*,” p. 168. For more on the extensive use of calembour in rhymed missives, see HITIN-MASHIAH and LAVI, *From Neot Midbar*, pp. 82-87. For more on the use of calembour as a literary device among the Jews of North Africa, see HITIN-MASHIAH and LAVI, “Comic means.”

<sup>14</sup> For more on the calembour, see NIZRI, “Linguistic jokes.”

Although the calembour involves a humorous effect, the North African *payyetanim* (piyyut poets) used the calembour as an artistic poetic device for all circumstances, including their laments. That is, they did not limit its use for humoristic texts. How so? Discussing one of the calembours of R. David ben Aaron Hasin inserted in a lament, Hazan writes:

This calembour calls for a short discussion, for sometimes in the context of complete sadness and deep mourning, the poet inserts a calembour allusion which is basically a witticism, and in normal circumstances we would have understood it as a word play [...] To reinforce this point which seems strange to us we will add one more example. In a dirge on the death of Rabbi Shelomo Toledano<sup>15</sup> the poet opens with: “The voice of the shofar was heard in the camp / I heard and had compassion on him // and I was told: Here is / **the death** (מיתתו, literally ‘his death’) of Shelomo” and the word ‘his death’ is marked by *gershayim*<sup>16</sup> before the final letter (to indicate the change [from the original מיטתו, i.e., ‘his bed, Shelomo’s bed’ in Song of Songs 3:7]). It is hard for us to see the appropriateness of this calembour, unless we say that it is precisely the gap between the event and the linguistic use that creates a sort of shock of pain and sadness, and this use of allusion enhances and reinforces the words of sadness and eulogy.<sup>17</sup>

Nizri offers another explanation. In his view, the words of consolation inserted in the lament present “a seemingly solemn occasion that is based on the belief in the passage of the soul into eternal life and its exalted meeting with the Divine Presence.

[...] This is an expression of optimism even in death. This optimism in a lament is, apparently, the explanation [...] for the calembour allusions and word play, for they all express optimism and belief in a passage that is all good.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Poem 161, *Kol shofar ba-mahane*; see E. HAZAN and A. E. ELBAZ, *Tehilla le-David: Poemes de David Ben Hassine - Le Chantre du Judaïsme Marocain* (Lod: Orot Yahdout Hamaghreb, 1999 [in Hebrew]) p. 536.

<sup>16</sup> *Gershayim* is customarily rendered in print with the typographically similar double quotation marks. For typographical reasons, the calembours will be emboldened in translation. If the calembour is within a larger emboldened unit, it will be italicized as well.

<sup>17</sup> E. HAZAN, *Hebrew Poetry in North Africa* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995 [in Hebrew]) p. 88.

<sup>18</sup> NIZRI, “*The Crying Voice*,” pp. 180-181.

Rabbi Raphael Aaron Monsonego introduced two main innovations in integrating the calembour technique into his poetic works. The first is his extensive use of the calembour in his poem "Ein Ach Vera" (Unique)<sup>19</sup> and the second is his use of the calembour technique as an amusing play on words<sup>20</sup> in lamentations for Tisha B'Av and in piyyutim of adomishment for Yom Kippur.

The pervasive use of the calembour in Monsonego's poetry is truly **unique** and this is the main **innovation** in his poetical work.<sup>21</sup> The calembour allusions are a basic building block in all of the poetical work of Monsonego. He amply employs them, especially in songs of praise, in dirges for the dead, in exhortations and laments for the Ninth of Av, and they are even the mainstay of two memorial laments for the Destruction of the Temple: "If I decide to arouse lament" (piyyut 18) and "Woe, what happened to me" (piyyut 22). We learn from this that R. Raphael did not limit the use of the calembour to comical contexts only, but thought of it as an aesthetic artistic device suitable to be used in other circumstances as well, and he uses it to enrich the text and to reinforce its meaning.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> A simple statistical examination of the extent of Monsonego's use of the calembour technique shows that he uses this artistic device in more than half of his poems (in 48 out of 83 in the *Neot Midbar* collection = 58%). A total of 230 words marked with double quotation marks were found (=1.7% of all the words in his poetry), constituting 141 different entries. Some of the calembours are used more than once and some are joined together into a linguistic combination, but most are independent and appear only once. See R. HITIN-MASHIAH and T. LAVI, "Word play marked by *gershayim* in the poetry of R. Raphael Aaron Monsonego," *Masorot* 13 (2007 [in Hebrew]) pp. 105-124.

<sup>20</sup> *Even-Shoshan Dictionary*, p. 1196.

<sup>21</sup> A simple statistical check about the use of the calembour establishes that Monsonego uses this artistic device in more than half of his poems (in 48 out of the 83 poems in the collection "Neot Midbar" =58%). All in all there were found two hundred and three word tokens with *gershayim* "quotation marks" (=1.7% of all words in his poems), word occurrences of one hundred forty-one word types used more than once. Some of the calembours occur more than once, and some of them are combined with others into one linguistic unit, yet most of them are independent and occur only once; HITIN-MASHIAH and LAVI, "Word play marked by *gershayim*."

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that some of the calembours have been used by others, e.g., לַסְפּוֹד לַצַּרִּיה וּלְבִכּוּתָהּ, "to mourn about **the trouble** and to weep for it" [צַרִּיה 'trouble', instead of Sarah in the original verse, Genesis 23:2], similar to Hasin (see HAZAN and ELBAZ, *Tehilla le-David*, p. 467, poem 129). One should also note that a similar calembour (without *gershayim*) is already found in Todros (Spain, 13th century) in his eulogy on the

Since the piyyut is a text that is delivered orally to begin with, one may expect the poet to use words having great phonetic similarity in order not to burden the listener too much. And, indeed, in most cases Monsonego makes minimal changes, yet the techniques used in his poetry are multiple and varied. Here are the various types in descending order of incidence:

1. Creating a calembour through changes in the pronunciation of consonants and vowels. For example, **הוא סוב"ר הרזי"ם** / **ארז ברוש תדהר** [...], "Cedar, cypress and acacia / he is *the thinker of secrets*" (70, line 15), based on **שבר ארזים**, "breaker of cedars," Psalm 29:5. **סובר הרזים**, "the thinker of secrets" (with changes of shin/samech and aleph/he) is an epithet for Rashbi (R. Shimon bar Yochai). Sound changes have been found most frequently in sibilants, which have no clear phonetic distinction in the North African pronunciation of the poet.<sup>23</sup> Another example: **אהל שכן** **באדם משכן שלי** ("a tent dwelling in man is *his* temple") (33, line 24); **מקדש השם מקדש שלי** ("the temple of the Lord is *his* temple") (75, line 12). **שלי** can be read as either the temple of God in Shiloh (based on Psalm 78:60) or **שלו**, "his" 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular possessive particle. The pronunciation of both words is identical due to the lack of distinction between the vowels [i] and [e] in the North African pronunciation of the poet.<sup>24</sup>

2. The creation of a calembour based on the literal meaning of names (names of persons and places as well as names of signs and terms).<sup>25</sup> For

---

death of Isaac ben Zadok, see D. YELLIN, ed., *Gan ha-meshalim ve'ha-hidot: osef shire Todros ben Yehuda Abu El 'afya 'al pi ktav yad Shaul ben 'eved-El Yosef*, 1 (Jerusalem: Defus Hasefer, 1932) p. 134, columns 37-38. Todros uses the calembour frequently as an artistic device, causing SHIRMAN (*Poetry in Christian Spain*, p. 395, especially note 105) to comment: "Even in eulogies he amuses himself with strange, astonishing, calembours that one cannot read with equanimity."

<sup>23</sup> Concerning the interchange of sibilants see for example M. BAR ASHER, *Traditions linguistiques des juifs d'Afrique du nord* (Jerusalem, 1999 [in Hebrew]) pp. 349-351; L. BRUNOT, *Introduction à l'arabe marocain* (Paris: Librairie Orientale Et Americaine, 1950) p. 37; K. KATZ, *The Hebrew Language Tradition of the community of Djerba*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978 [in Hebrew]) pp. 12-16.

<sup>24</sup> Concerning the phonetic articulation of vowels see BAR ASHER, *Traditions linguistiques*, p. 341.

<sup>25</sup> On the use of proper nouns in their literal sense see D. YELLIN, *Torat ha-shira ha-sfaradit* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978) pp. 275-278; H. SHIRMAN, *The History of Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain. Edited, Annotated and Supplemented by Ezra Fleischer*

example, להציל לו מרעתו / לבני חֲבֵרִים וּבְרִיעֵיהֶם לעזרה, “to save him from evil / through help from **companions and friends**” (28, line 21), based on Num. 26:45, where Heber and Beriah are the names of descendants of Asher, while the intended meaning here is ‘companions and friends’ (חברים ורעים). Another example: רש ולען ומרה / מעמה תְּרִי טַעְמִיין (22, line 19), “poison, wormwood and gall / for **two reasons**.” תרי טעמין / Tere Ta‘amin (literally ‘two cantillation notes’) is the name of a biblical cantillation note mentioned in the Zarqa Table, Sephardic tradition (=Mercha kefulah), whereas here it means “two reasons” (טעם meaning, among others, either ‘cantillation note’ or ‘reason’).

3. The creation of a calembour based on lexical ambiguity. For example, גם בְּרִגְלֵי מוֹעֵד־ת / אל תבוא רננה בו, “Even **with a faltering leg** (or “**in a pilgrimage festival and holy day**”) / let there be no singing (in it),” based on Proverbs 25:19. The poet means here both ‘**faltering leg**’ and ‘**pilgrimage festival (רגל) and holy day (מועד)**.’

4. The creation of a calembour based on a metaphorical sense.<sup>26</sup> For example, כי הלבישך בְּגָדֵי יִשׁוּעַ, “for He has dressed you in **garments of salvation**” (45, line 10), based on Isa. 61:10. ישוע are festive clothes worn by those who were saved from distress, and here they are used as a name for ritual fringes and phylacteries.

5. The creation of a calembour based on a double reading of homographs. For example, רב שְׁרִייהֶ שר מנוחה, “most of **her princes (rulers)** are quiet princes” (47, line 20), based on וְשֵׁרָיָה שר מנוחה, “And this Seraiah was a quiet prince” (Jer. 51:59), and the poet changed the proper name Seraiah into its homographic “her princes.”

6. The creation of a calembour based on uniting word pairs or dividing a single word into two. For example, עזר ומפלטי לי / אֲחִיאָב שקול היה, “He was like **both a brother and a father** / a help and refuge to me / like a friend” (74, line 20). The word אֲחִיאָב is a fusion (more precise-

(Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995 [in Hebrew]) pp. 51-52. Additionally see E. HAZAN, “Poetic simile in letters, vowels and cantilations,” *Mehkarim be-lashon* 2-3 (1987 [in Hebrew]) pp. 367-395; R. MASHIAH, “Names of Accents and Diacritical Punctuation Signs in Poems By North African Jewish Poets,” *Sefarad* 62:2 (2002) pp. 349-368, especially pp. 356-361.

<sup>26</sup> On the metaphorical use of allusions see E. HAZAN, *The Poetics of The Sephardi Piyut According to the Liturgical Poetry of Yehuda Halevi* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986 [in Hebrew]) pp. 242-247.

ly, concatenation) of the words for brother and father, respectively, also meaning ‘the father’s brother, uncle’ (and it looks as if he is not alluding to the homophonic biblical Ahab).

Up to now we have given examples of the methods of formation of the various types of word play indicated with *gershayim* (“double quotation marks”). In what follows I give several examples of the artistic use that Monsonego makes of this device in his entire poetical oeuvre:

לְזֹאת עֵינַי זֹוּבוֹן / מִמֶּם בְּבוֹר הַצִּיָּה

“For this reason my eyes flow / water in the pit of **agony and calamity**”

In the piyyut אָבוּא הָעִיר אוֹמֵר, “If I decide **to arouse lament**,” a lament for the Ninth of Av, R. Raphael bewails the many troubles befalling the Jewish people and describes the tears pouring like water, namely, לְזֹאת עֵינַי זֹוּבוֹן / מִמֶּם בְּבוֹר הַצִּיָּה, “For this reason my eyes flow / water in the pit of **agony and calamity**.” This utterance is based on the place name בּוֹר הַסִּירָה, “the cistern of Sirah,” mentioned in 2 Sam. 3:26. The poet takes this name as a starting point and adds to it the poetic column לְזֹאת עֵינַי זֹוּבוֹן מִמֶּם, “For this reason my eyes flow water,” while changing “the cistern of Sirah” to a cistern (or pit) of צָרָה (by changing the letter samech into tsadi), namely, to a reservoir of troubles (צרות) and a place into which the tears flow. Thus one hears at the background of the sound pattern of pangs and pain an allusion to the troubles and suffering that have befallen the Jewish people because of the Destruction of the Temple and the ensuing deep sorrow of the poet: his eyes flow water because of the many agonies (צירים) and calamities (צרות) in the Vale of Tears that he and his generation are immersed in.

הוּא נָגִיד וּמְצָחָה / מְבַחַר גְּבֻרֵינוּ

“He is a ruler and commander / **the choicest of our men**”

In the dirge for the dead “I will bitterly lament” that he wrote on “the taking away of the mighty one of the city, the great man,” the poet eulogizes the deceased and says of him: מְבַחַר גְּבֻרֵינוּ, “**the choicest of our men**.” In this dirge the deceased is described as “the choicest of our men,” based on בַּמְבַחַר קְבֻרֵינוּ קְבוֹר אֶת מֵתֶךָ, “in **the choicest of our tombs** bury your dead” (Gen. 23:6). The identity of sound in both phrases causes one to identify with the pain on the loss of a man who was one of the choicest of the people and on bringing him to burial.

הנה מזמרת האר"ש / אקריב לפני שוכן ערץ

"From the choicest fruit of my **speech** / I will offer to the Dweller of Heaven"

In "I will glorify God," a thanksgiving poem on his recovery from grave illness, Monsonego calls: הנה מזמרת האר"ש / אקריב לפני שוכן ערץ, "From the choicest fruit of my **speech** / I will offer to the Dweller of Heaven." This utterance is based on the story of the descent of the children of Jacob to Egypt. In the biblical story Jacob commands his children to offer the Egyptian governor from זמרת הארץ (Gen. 43:11), namely, to offer him from the choicest fruit of the Land of Israel. R. Raphael introduces two changes in the biblical phrase. He changes זמרה meaning 'fruit' to זמרה meaning 'song' and 'chanting' and he changes ארץ, 'land' into ארש, 'whisper of prayer' (by exchanging the letters tsadi and sin). In this way he is praising the Almighty and thanks Him for lifting him up from his sickbed and he offers Him his choicest poetry.

משרת ענויים על שכמו / ה' אלוהיו עמו

"An office of the **humble** he shoulders / the Lord God is with him"

Num. 6:3 mentions משרת ענבים, "the juice of grapes," that the Nazirite should abstain from. In the song of praise "I will prepare a song of praising" to "a mighty and great one in Israel," R. Raphael changes on phonetic similarity ענבים 'grapes' to ענויים 'humble ones,' and משרת 'juice of' to משרת 'office of,' in order to describe the virtue of humility and modesty characterizing the deceased and to indicate his eminence. Through the biblical verses the poet ascribes to the praised person additional virtues: the virtue of saintliness is ascribed to him because of the indirect reference to the Nazirite, and the use of the rare word משרה 'office, rule, dominion' gives rise to the biblical superlatives associated with this word, as it is said: ותהי המשרה על שכמו ויקרא שמו פלא יועץ אל גבור אביעד שר שלום... "… and the office shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:5[6]).

כי צידי פסקי שדר"ה / גם משבר צלעיים

"For my sides are parts of **spine** / as well as **shattered ribs**"

In order to describe the state of the Jewish people in exile and his own pain, in "If I decide to **arouse lament**" R. Raphael says: כי צידי פסקי שדר"ה / גם משבר צלעיים, "For my sides are parts of **spine** / as well

as **shattered ribs**.” The phrase מְשֻׁבֵּר צְלָעִים is based on 1 Kings 19:11, והנה ה' עובר ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשבֵּר סלעים, “and behold the Lord is passing and a strong and mighty wind tears mountains apart and **shatters rocks**.” Thus he compares his ribs to shattered rocks (the calembour צלעיִם ‘ribs’ is according to the North African pronunciation of the poet who reads סלעים as צלעיִם ‘rocks’). He also refers to the Mishna in Tractate Hullin (chapter 3, Mishna 1) that talks about a domestic animal whose spine is broken and is hence unfit, and compares himself and the Jewish people to it. In this fashion he causes the reader to identify with the feeling of pain and brokenness of the Jewish people lost in exile.

נִפְשִׁי כְּמוֹ חוֹלָאִים / כְּתוּתִי מִכֶּתֶת צְעוּרִי א

“My soul is like **illnesses** / I am crushed to dust with **sorrow**”

In the lament for the Ninth of Av “I will think bitterly with sadness,” R. Raphael compares his sorrow on the destruction of the temple and on the lengthy exile to an oppressive illness, saying: נִפְשִׁי כְּמוֹ חוֹלָאִים, “my soul is **like illnesses**.” The calembour חוֹלָאִים is based on Song of Songs (7:2): חֲמוּקֵי יָרֵכֶיךָ כְּמוֹ חֲלָאִים מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי אִמֶּן, “The curves of your thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skillful craftsman.” In the original the word חֲלָאִים means ‘jewels,’ but the poet changes the meaning of the word to חֲלָאִים ‘illnesses,’ to describe his sick soul. The rest of the column is based on a quote from the Talmud<sup>27</sup>: כְּתוּתִי מִכֶּתֶת שִׁיב עוּרִיהָ: “its sizes have been crushed to dust” (Tractate *Eruvin*, leaf 80, page B). Basing himself on an utterance discussing the use of broken splinters of wood of Asherah and their sizes, Monsonego introduces an utterance referring to the breaking fall and the crushing blow that the Jewish people suffered and to the deep sadness resulting from the destruction of the temple.

יָבֵשׁ כְּעֵץ נִתְרוֹקֵן / מְשִׁיחַ לְפִי תוֹמוֹ

“Dry as a tree emptied / **of speech** guilelessly”

The idiom מְשִׁיחַ לְפִי תוֹמוֹ originally means ‘a truthful speaker.’<sup>28</sup> Maimonides in *Hilchot Gerushin* (12, 1) states who is a reliable witness: “A man who is disqualified because of an infringement of a law of Torah is unreliable if he comes as a witness to a woman and tells her that her hus-

<sup>27</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Talmudic references are to the Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>28</sup> From מְשִׁיחַ לְפִי תוֹמוֹ, תיטוק מסיח לפי תומו, “a child speaking in all innocence” (Talmud *Baba Kamma* 114B).

band is dead. Yet if **he were speaking in all innocence** (משיח לפי תומו) he is reliable.” In the lament for the Ninth of Av “I weep bitterly and cry,” the word מְשִׁיחַ also concerns talking and speech, yet the initial letter *mem* is used as a preposition, namely, מִ-מְשִׁיחַ,<sup>29</sup> meaning ‘from talk, from speech.’ R. Raphael, then, is using this idiom to express the complete emptiness that is taking hold of his soul, to the point that he becomes speechless, and his mouth is completely “dry” and bereft **of speech**, of talking (in Hebrew the preposition used is “from,” i.e., “from speech”= of speech).

נָגְדוּ יֶצְאוּ בְנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן / בְּשִׁיר מְכֻתָּם וְשִׁנְיֹן

“The children of the Most High came out to greet him /  
in song psalm and eulogy”

In the dirge on the death of his father “Alas, the Rock [the Almighty] has broken forth,” the poet describes the reception given the deceased by the celestial retinue. The clause יֶצְאוּ בְנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן בְּשִׁיר, “The children of the Most High came out **in song**,” hails from a Mishna in Tractate Shabbat (chapter 5, Mishna 1): וְכָל בְּעֵלֵי הַשִּׁיר יוֹצְאִים בְּשִׁיר וְנִמְשָׁכִים בְּשִׁיר: “and all chainwearers may go out with their chains and be led by their chains.” Namely, the word שִׁיר means ‘chain’ (שִׁרְשֵׁרֶת). On the other hand, based on שִׁיר לְדָוִד אֲשֶׁר שָׁר, “A psalm [*shigayon*] of David that he sang...” (Ps. 7:1), it means ‘song’ (שִׁיר). And from both references it is hinted that the members of the celestial retinue go out together in a chain (one after another) in order to welcome the deceased in song and chant.

As was already said, the calembour is one of the salient features in the poems and piyyutim of R. Raphael Aaron Monsonego, and it constitutes an integral part of his poetry. For now it looks as if the varied, broad and frequent use of this artistic device in his poetry is unique to him and we have not found anything like it in North African poetry and piyyutim (before him). In order to demonstrate the use that R. Raphael makes of the calembour in all its power we present the lament for the Ninth of Av “If I decide to arouse lament” in its entirety, for it is wholly based on this particular artistic device. The translation of the piyyut is followed by a detailed list of sources and glosses, and then the Hebrew original is reproduced.

<sup>29</sup> It should be born in mind that there is no distinction in the poet’s North African pronunciation between the vowels [i] and [e].

If I resolve *to arouse lament*<sup>30</sup>

The time: for the Ninth of Av

Structure: belt song

Rhyme: ababab / cccz / dddz / efefef / gggz / hhhz

Rhythm: seven syllables in each half verse (צלע)

Signature: I am Raphael Aaron Hazaq<sup>31</sup>

Guidepost: Marpe 'el tsir (מרפא אל ציר) (Treasury, m-2436)

If I resolve **to arouse lament** / my troubles just abound and  
augment

Then as I write just a little bit / stalk and reed do wilt

Even when night **is awake** as day / and time ceased yet they  
stay

When I count them they increase as sand grains countless / the yoke  
of their kingdom is growing boundless / because of  
this my eye flows / water into the pit of **throes**

5 Alas if I live my mortal days / only sorrow and suffering I  
spread / the breach of my blow is fatal  
/ to whom should I flee for succor

My heart melts away like water / each day I am **frying in  
the pan**

Pangs causing howling as far as Eglaim / and the enemy's **speech  
is harsh as the speech of the Hittites**

He doubly arouses **his lament** / **the laments** grew fourfold

Sevenfold / is this **illness** of all other **illnesses** / it goes up  
ascending / overcoming all else

10 Woe for this they pour down rain / my eyes pour out water / until  
are broken apart / all spinal vertebrae

<sup>30</sup> For typographical reasons, in translation the calembours are emboldened (and not marked with *gershayim*). If a whole line is emboldened, the calembour is italicized as well. No attempt was made to keep either rhyme or rhythm of the original throughout.

<sup>31</sup> One should point out that his signature in the address is אני רפאל אהרן חזק, "I am Raphael Aaron Hazaq," whereas in the acrostic it is: אני רפאל, "I am Rapha'el" (the letter aleph is duplicated), as if reading רפא-אל, "heal, God."

**אם אומר אבוא העי"ר**

העת : לתשעה באב  
 תבנית : שיר אזור  
 חריזה : אבאבאב / גגת / דדדת. הוהוהו / זזזת / חחחת  
 משקל : שבע הברות בכל צלע  
 חתימה : אני רפאל אהרן חזק  
 לתמרור : "מרפא אל ציר" (אוצר, מ-2436)

אם אומר אבוא העי"ר / צרותי רבו גדלו  
 או אז אכתוב קט זעיר / קנה נסוף קמלו  
 גם לילה כיום יעי"ר / פלה זמן לא יכלו  
 אספרם מחול רבון / ונירם אבד חשבון / לזאת עיני זובון / מים  
 בבור הצר"ה

אזי אם ימי כימי אנוש / יגון ועמל אפרוס / שבר מפתי אנוש / למי אנוס 5

**לעזרה**

נמס לבי כמים / כל יום עושה חביתי"ם  
 צירים יללת אגלים / ארש"ו אר"ש החתי"ם  
 יעיר קינ"ו כפלים / עמדו קינ"ם רבעת"ם  
 הן בשבע כפולות / נחל"ה זו מן נחלו"ת / עולה היא במעלות / על הכל  
 מתגברה

אזי לזה מטר יזוקו / עיני מים זריקו / עד אשר נתפקו / כל חוליות 10

**שבשדךה**

- I am worn out from groaning / for this **sadness** has grown  
 I found no rest / every day from evil doers  
 I was hit by a tree / suffering harm and injury  
 This one hit me with a cane / that one with his bag / I am  
 weary of holding it in and I am not / able to mourn  
**for this trouble**
- 15 Woe when I see my protection removed / all who see me mock me  
 / when they ask me / why God has abandoned me  
 Broad **broad** is my mouth **calling** / when God distributes  
 sorrows  
 I call: “Deborah, wake up, / your honey the locust ate up,  
 He destroyed root and fruit / the **shocks** and standing grain he  
 torched”  
 Ah, there is no medicine / to me from the sons of the giant  
 / how was dawn turned into darkness  
 / and the maidservant supplanted the mistress
- 20 Oh, my heart, calm down, be still / and let me curse my day  
 / for my people have become lost sheep  
 / looted, sold for nothing  
 My face has fallen until / it descended into deep pits  
 For these descendants of **Asher** / who became scattered loot  
 Utterly consumed by oppression, / affliction, and untold damage  
 Whatever crawls on its belly / thought itself as Og and as Sihon / me  
 they called stench / and cried out: “impure, impure”
- 25 Woe, when a thinking fellow remembers this period / the blood of  
 his heart curdles / how a Father sold the  
 firstborn / and He despised the right of the firstborn  
 I will call for a fast, a sacred assembly, / tearing my heart to pieces  
 My eye, my eye flows / **pours and absorbs** the forty lashes  
 For my sides are broken parts of **spine** / as well as shattered **ribs**  
 For they have been banished from a nation / they were  
**butchered and cut up** / neither cleansed nor  
 bandaged / from an enduring blow
- 30 Woe for the slain, how many, / my heart is as without blood  
 / listen my brothers and people / let us mourn  
 with lament **for the trouble**  
 I ask of you a word of prophecy / by consulting spirits, or casting spells

- יגעתי באנחתי / כי זה הצעיר עלי  
 מניחה לא מצאתי / כל יום מבני עולה  
 אך מופת עץ הייתי / בגזק וחבלה  
 עלי זה בא במקלו / וזה בא בתרמילו / נלאיתי כלכל ולא / אוכל  
 לספוד לצר"ה
- 15 אוי בראותי כי סר צלי / כל רואי זלעיגו לי / עת אשר ישאלו לי / מדוע  
 מתנכרה  
 רחב רח"ב פי מקר"י / וחבלים יחלק  
 אומר דבורה עורי / דבשך אכל הילק  
 השמיד שורש ופרי / גדי"ש עד קמה הדליק  
 הו לא נמצא תרופה / לי מילדי הרפה / איך היה שחר עיפה / שפחה  
 תירש גבירה
- 20 אוי לבי הרגעי דומי / ונאקלל את יומי / צאן אובדות היו עמי / לבו  
 חנם מכירה  
 פני נפלו עד אשר / ירדו תוך מהמורות  
 על אלה בני אש"ר / היו לבו נפזרות  
 ספו תמו מעוצר / רעה נזקי צרורות  
 כל הולך על גחון / עצמו פּעוג וכסיחון / אותי קראו סרחון / וטמא  
 טמא יקרא
- 25 אוי עת זה בן דעת זכור / דם לבבו יעבור / איך אב מכר בן בכור / ויבז  
 הבכורה  
 אקדם צום עצרה / אקרע לבי לקרעים  
 עיני עיני נגרה / שופ"ך את הארבעים  
 כי צידי פסקי שד"רה / גם משבר צלעי"ם  
 הן מן גוי יגורשו / התקוצצ"ו וקוצ"ו / לא זורו לא חובשו / במכה  
 בלתי סרה
- 30 אוי פחללים כמה / לבי כנטול דמי / שמעו אחי ועמי / בואו לספוד  
 לצר"ה  
 אבקשה מכם דבר / שואל אוב חובר חבר



- הן שְׁפִתַי בַּמִּדְבָּר / תָּעוּ לֹא יָכְלוּ דַבֵּר  
 מְדוּעַ קָרַנִי נִשְׁבֵּר / וְצָר עָלַי מִתְגַּבֵּר  
 מִשׁׁ"א מִצָּרִי"ם עַד מָה / יִגְבֵּר וְיָדוּ כְּמָה / וְלוּ בֵּת מְלֻדָּה אָמָה / וְיִסִּירָה  
 מִגְּבִירָה
- 35 אוֹי סְפוֹת הַצִּי"ר סְפוֹ"ד / אֶת יְצוּעֵי בּוֹ אֲרָפוֹד / כִּי לְקֹאת וְקִפּוֹד / אֲרָץ  
 חֲפָץ נִמְסָרָה  
 לְבָבִי בִּי סִחְרָחַר / אֶף עַת אֵלֶּה אֲזַכִּירָה  
 הִנֵּה גְרוֹנֵי נִיחַר / רַחֲשֵׁי לוֹ מִתּוֹאֲרָה  
 נִין יִשִׁי אֶתָּה תִבְחַר / לוֹ מִשְׁפֵּט הַבְּכוֹרָה  
 חֵישׁ קוֹם נָא מִשְׁחֵהוּ / זֹכְרָהוּ וְנוֹקְבֵהוּ / קָרְנוּ תִרוֹם דְּגִלְהוּ / יְרוֹם  
 חֵישׁ קַל מִהֲרָה
- 40 אֲזַ בְּהִלָּל וּבְהוֹדָאָה / וּבְאִשׁוּרֵי"י הַנְּאִ"ה / שְׁמֹךְ אֲשִׁיר אֶקְרָאָה / אֶת כָּל  
 דַּבְּרֵי הַשִּׁירָה

### Sources and Glosses

1 **if ... arouse lament**: based on 2 Kings 7:4, where העיר is a locative adjunct ('the city'), while here it is used as a verb meaning 'arouse, call forth lament,' as in Mishna *Mo'ed Katan* 1:5: "A man may not *call forth lamentation* (יעורר) for his dead nor arrange a funeral oration (יספדנו) for him for thirty days before a Festival." (Blackman translation, italics added).– **my troubles ... abound**: see Ps. 3:2[1].

2 **then ... bit**: even if I mention only just a few of my troubles, see Isa. 28:10.– **stalk ... wilt**: stalk and reed, namely, pen and paper (stalk [קנה] = calamus, whence קולמוס, writing reed, and reed [סוף], papyrus reed, papyrus, paper), based on Isa. 19:6.

3 **night is awake**: based on Ps. 139:12. In the source text 'gives light, shines' (יאיר), while here a witticism: even the night is awake (יעיר) and ready to tell in it of all my troubles.– **time ... stay**: meaning 'life will end before the troubles are over.'

4 **I count ... countless**: describing the innumerable troubles that surpass the countless grains of sand on the seashore, based on Ps. 139:18. Reversal of fortune: the blessing has changed to a curse, cf. Gen. 22:17.– **the yoke ... boundless**: the source text (Num. 21:30) concerns the war of the Lord against the kingdom of Heshbon, where ונירם is traditionally construed as "their kingdom" (cf. Rashi, *ibid.*). ניר may also mean 'yoke, burden,' and the meaning here is that it's impossible to count and sum up (*Heshbon* read as its homographic 'count, sum') the burden and yoke of the enemy because of its infinitude.– **my eye flows**: I weep profusely, alluding to Lam. 3:48-49.– **in the pit of throes**: based on "the cistern of Sirah," 2 Sam. 3:26.

5 **mortal days**: mortal man whose life is short, based on Job 10:5.– **sorrow and suffering**: based on Jer. 20:18, here he means the lot of the people.– **my blow is fatal**: based on Jer. 15:18.– **to whom ... succor**: based on Isa. 10:3.

6 **melts ... like water**: alludes to Josh. 7:5.– **frying in the pan**: based on 1 Chron. 9:31. In the source text it refers to the offering of the High Priest, while here the poet is describing his heart that is like the fine flour kneaded and sizzling in the frying pan. It may also allude to the sound of clasps (חבטים).

7 **howling ... Eglaim**: based on Isa. 15:8, meaning a great outcry that is heard afar (Eglaim is a city in Moab).– **speech ... Hittites**: created through concatenation, based on "His bed was a bed of iron" (Deut. 3:11)

+ "land of the Hittites" (Josh. 1:4). Here Monsonego changes, by way of calembour, the word *his bed* (ערש) into *his speech* (ארשת, cf. שפתיים, "expression of the lips") thus hinting at the enemy whose speech to the people is harsh and frightful and the land of exile is hard for the people as iron.

8 **wakes ... lament**: based on Deut. 32:11.– **grew ... fourfold**: based on Mishna *Kritot* 1,7. Fourfold, to indicate the multiplicity of laments.

9 **sevenfold**: literally 'seven pairs,' based on "... and twenty-two fundamental letters. Three mothers and seven pairs and twelve single ones and there is wind, spirit, in each of them" (*Sefer Yetsira* 1,8), and here indicating ascending multiplicity.– **illness ... illnesses**: based on Ps. 124:4, "Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the brook (נחלה) had gone over our soul." The word נחלה means (among others) either "illness" (based on Talmud *Baba Batra* 117A) or 'brook, rivulet'.– **goes up ascending**: based on the Burial Prayer, and see also Mishna *Tamid* 6,1.

10 **pour down rain**: based on Job 36:27, referring to his tears.– **pour out**: literally 'make empty, empty out,' see Eccles. 11:3.– **broken ... vertebrae**: see Talmud *Berachot* 28B, where the talk is about a person's spinal vertebrae loosening and "falling apart" due to ritually bowing down. Here they fall apart due to the yoke of the enemy.

11 **I am worn ... groaning**: based on Jer. 45:3.– **this sadness** (צעיר): a witticism based on Ps. 118:20, "This gate (שער) of the Lord the righteous will enter."

12 **I found no rest**: based on Jer. 45:3.– **evil doers**: literally 'children of iniquity' (cf. 1 Sam. 3:34), an epithet for the enemy.

13 **hit by a tree**: based on the Mishna *Yevamot* 6,4, meaning the damage is great and irreversible.– **harm and injury**: great losses.

14 **this one ... his bag**: based on Talmud *Baba Batra* 133B, they attack him harshly.– **weary holding in**: based on Jer. 20:9, he can no longer bear his suffering.– **mourn for this trouble**: a calembour based on Gen. 23:2.

15 **my protection removed**: literally 'shadow, shade,' figuratively 'protection,' from Num. 14:9.– **all ... me**: based on Ps. 22:8.– **God has abandoned me**: ignores; literally 'feigns oneself a she-stranger' (1 Kings 14:6).

16 **broad ... calling**: witticism based on the Talmudic saying: "Who-soever says: 'Rahab, Rahab' immediately experiences ejaculation" (Talmud *Ta'anit* 8B) and meaning 'a great hue and cry.' The name Rahab also

meaning ‘broad, wide’.– **distributes sorrows**: from Job 21:17, here the poet bewails the fate of the Jewish people.

17 **Deborah, wake up**: based on Judg. 5:12, an epithet for the Jewish people, calling and encouraging it to stand up and do something about its sorry state.– **your honey ... ate up**: based on Jl 1:4, *locust* is an epithet for the enemy who plagues the people.

18 **destroyed ... fruit**: total destruction.– **shocks ... torched**: shocks, i.e., sheaves of grain, based on Judg. 15:5. The calembour alludes to the idiom הגדיש את הסאה, ‘to go too far, overdo, exaggerate,’ which shares the same root as *shocks* (גדיש), and the poet means the boundless damage the enemy has caused the people.

19 **from the sons of the giant**: based on 2 Sam. 21:18, an epithet for the enemy.– **how ... darkness**: expressing surprise, based on Amos 4:13.– **maidservant ... mistress**: an allusion to Gen. 16:4. A reversal of status: in the source text Hagar supposedly inherits, supplants, Sarah, whereas here the enemy inherits the senior position of the Jewish people (see also Talmud *Ta’anit* 21B).

20 **calm down, be still**: based on Jer. 47:6, while Jeremiah refers to the sword of the LORD that does not cease from killing the enemy, here he means that there is no rest for his weary heart.– **curse my day**: alludes to Jer. 20:14.– **lost sheep**: based on Jer. 50:6, an epithet for the people in exile.– **sold for nothing**: based on Isa. 52:3, an allusion to God’s promise to His people Israel that their rulers will let them leave their place of residence in exile and go up to the Land of Israel without payment.

22 **these ... Asher**: following 1Chron. 7:40, an epithet for the leaders of the people who understood things perfectly (לאשורים, sharing the same root with Asher), or confirmed (מאשרים, sharing the same root) rulings as judges. Also, Asher, Jacob’s son, is mentioned to indicate numerous progeny as is written in a midrash to the same verse in *Sifrei*: “you will not find one that is blessed with sons as Asher was” (*cf.* Deut. 33:24).– **became ... loot**: based on 2 Kings 21:14.

23 **utterly consumed**: based on Ps. 73:19, ‘destroyed’.– **oppression, affliction**: based on Ps. 107:39, ‘evil government’.– **untold damage**: great losses, following Talmud *Ketubot* 41B.

24 **whatever ... belly**: based on Lev. 11:42, the enemy is likened to a snake.– **as Og and as Sihon**: based on Deut. 31:4, similes for the enemy.– **cried out impure**: based on Lev. 13:45, the people is outcast as a leper.

25 **thinking fellow**: based on *Baba Kamma* 54B.– **father ... first-born**: based on Gen. 25:34, here the Almighty seemingly abandons the Jewish people called “my firstborn son Israel.”

26 **I ... assembly**: I will get ready for a fast and calling to God, based on JI 1:14.

27 **my ... flows**: based on Lam. 3:49.– **pours ... forty lashes**: based on Mishna *Hullin* 7,3, the calembour means for us to read it as “absorbs forty lashes.”

28 **for ... spine**: based on Mishna *Hullin* 3,1.– **shattered ribs**: based on 1 Kings 19:11.

29 **for they ... nation**: based on Job 30:5.– **butchered and cut up**: based on Zeph. 2:1.– **neither ... bandaged**: were not given any treatment, based on Isa. 1:6.– **enduring blow**: a blow that does not end, alluding to Isa. 1:5.

30 **the slain how many**: based on *Shemot Rabbah* 1, 34, meaning that his heart is dead (like the heart of the slain).– **without blood**: based on Talmud *Hullin* 58B.– **listen ... people**: based on 1 Chron. 28:2.– **mourn ... for the trouble**: based on Gen. 23:2.

31 **consulting ... spells**: based on Deut. 18:11, he is addressing all sorts of mediums specializing in summoning the spirits of the dead.

32 **my lips ... wilderness**: a calembour based on: “your speech is comely” (Song of Songs 4:3), the word מדבר meaning both ‘wilderness’ and ‘speech’.– **gone astray**: based on Ps. 107:4, the clause “my lips ... gone astray” is made by concatenation, and this emphasizes the dryness of his lips (either from suffering or from continuous supplication and prayer). Thus, when talking, his lips go astray as if in the wilderness, and they do not find the proper way of expression.

33 **my horn broken**: see Jer. 48:25, referring to Moab, whereas here he refers to the Jewish people whose glory has faded and its strength is gone.– **an enemy overcame**: alludes to Lam. 1:16.

34 **burden of Egypt**: an oracle concerning Egypt, based on Isa. 19:1. The calembour is understood as the synonymous ‘burden’ or yoke of Egypt, and it points at the people who suffer straits and distress (the word for Egypt in Hebrew is מצרים, which can also be read as ‘straits’).– **princess a maid**: describing the reversal of fortune of the Jewish people.– **removed her from queen**: based on 1 Kings 15:13, it is here a continuation of the previous clause, as God apparently despising his people.

35 **add**: based on “Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices” (Jer. 7:21).— **lament the pain**: based on 2 Kings 4:38, where the original clause means ‘set fire on the pot, boil.’ The calembour changes it to the phonetically similar “lament the pain,” hence the whole unit means “add lament to the pain”.— **spread ... bed**: based on Job 17:13, the pain serves as bedding to sleep on.— **to the desert owl and screech owl**: based on Isa. 34:11, traditionally construed to be nocturnal birds of prey (cf. Rashi, *ibid.*), an epithet for the enemy.— **delightful Land**: based on Mal. 3:12, the Desirable Land, an epithet for the Land of Israel.

36 **my heart throbs**: based on Ps. 38:11[10].

37 **my throat is parched**: based on Ps. 69:4[3].— **I feel for it**: refers to the sounds emanating from his throat.

38 **elect ... offspring**: to become king.— **he has ... firstborn**: based on Deut. 21:17, continued from the previous clause, and meaning that the kingship was given to the House of David.

39 **arise ... anoint him**: based on 1 Sam. 16:12, a call urging for the coming of redemption through the Son of Jesse, the messiah of David.— **remember and appoint him**: literally ‘make it either masculine or feminine,’<sup>32</sup> and it can also be read (as it is here) as “remember him and mention his name.” Here it is a continuation of the preceding and meaning: “remember and determine” (the king from the House of David, harbinger of Redemption).— **his horn will rise**: based on Ps. 89:25[24].— **swiftly and speedily**: based on Isa. 5:26, here describing the swiftness of the coming of the messianic king.

40 **approbations of enjoyment**: a punning reversal of the original “prohibitions of enjoyment,” as in Talmud *Eruvin* 31A. The calembour continues from the preceding since the Jewish people will thank the Almighty for its redemption through singing, enjoyment (and joy).— **all ... song**: based on Deut. 32:44.

*Recibido*: 4/11/2013

*Aceptado*: 06/07/2015

<sup>32</sup> This phrase *זָכַרְהוּ וּנְקַבְּהוּ* is used in grammatical discussions about masculine and feminine gender. Mentioned in *Arugot Ha-Bosem* 7, 28, it is ascribed to Ibn Ezra; see E. GOLDENBERG, “Linguistics and proper Hebrew in the Middle Ages,” *Leshonenu* 54 (1990 [in Hebrew]) pp. 190-216.