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Ezra ha-Bavli

Ezra ha-Bavli was a rabbi and Hebrew poet who lived in Iraq during the first half of the eighteenth century. His *Tokhehot Musar* (Heb. Moralistic Reproofs), completed in 1731, was published in 1735 in Castaneda. His *Netivot Shalom* (Heb. Paths of Peace), which included castigations, homilies, and biblical exegesis, was published in 1742.

Ha-Bavli had a phenomenal knowledge of the Bible the Babylonian Talmud, and other Jewish sources. His aesthetic achievement in *Tokhehot Musar* was remarkable. The book is a poetical guide to the ethical life intended to keep readers from straying onto the wrong path. Structurally it consists of a broad introduction, seventeen castigations focused on specific issues (e.g., prayer, slander, envy, cursing, arrogance, gluttony, addiction to alcohol), and a conclusion. Each castigation begins with a brief opening in praise of the power of the specific castigation, describes the punishments in store for readers who do not change their sinful ways, and concludes with the poetic speaker's demand that the admonished reader repent, followed by a description of the rewards of a life of faith and ethical conduct. The book has 216 pages, and each line is in two parts. The poems were affected by the biblical meter.

Some of the themes treated are universal. Using the Hebrew vocabulary available in his time, and particularly Biblical Hebrew, Ha-Bavli played the language as a virtuoso, skillfully using it to express his refined ideas. His style is highly sophisticated and his creativity extraordinary. His images are captivating, and the lyrical cogitation dwells on themes close to the human heart.

Using his books as a source for his biography, it may be concluded that Ezra ha-Bavli was the son of a learned and religious father. He was persecuted, viewed himself as having a mission to reprove sin, led a life of spirituality, and did not pursue material success. Although his vision deteriorated, he insisted on personally preparing his books for the printer.

Bibliography

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