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Return to al-Andalus beyond German-Jewish Orientalism: Abraham Shalom Yahuda's Critique of Modern Jewish Discourse

Abraham Shalom Yahuda (1877–1951) had a similar academic biography to other German-Jewish orientalists of his time (among them some of the intellectuals discussed elsewhere in this volume). Like many of them he was trained in the German system of Oriental studies, located at the intersection between Islamic and Jewish studies. In his research, he focused on the intertwined Judeo-Muslim worlds and on the Hebrew-Arabic linguistic and cultural connections. Yahuda's intellectual work was certainly influenced by the main modern Jewish intellectual trends—the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* circles, and Hebrew revivalism. Yet at the same time, his work was no less inspired by the Arab *al-Nahda* ("Arab Awakening") movement, the Ottoman political and cultural reformation (the *Tanzimat*), and the Sephardic intellectual circles of his time. Indeed, Yahuda was a unique figure in the German orientalist circles of the turn of the twentieth century: a Palestinian native with a Baghdadi background, and with a strong Jerusalemite and Sephardic affiliation. This unusual identity had a strong bearing on his views and writings regarding Jewish modernization, Zionism, and the Jewish and Arab questions. Gradually, Yahuda developed a major critique of what he describes as the Westernization and Europeanization of Jewish culture promoted by some leading scholars like Abraham Berliner, Chaim Brody or Abraham Harkavy of the *Wissenschaft*- and *Haskalah*-circles of his time.

Over the course of more than five decades of intellectual work, Yahuda engaged in disputes with some of the leading Jewish scholars and political activists of his time (most of them European Jews) over the modernization of Jewish culture and Jewish history and its effect on Jewish life in Europe and in Palestine/Land of Israel. Throughout this period, he emphasized the importance of returning to the Judeo-Muslim tradition, and to the Judeo-Arabic culture that had developed over the centuries, as a means of reviving Hebrew and Jewish culture and modernizing Jewish life in Palestine/Land of Israel. In his arguments, Yahuda blurred the boundaries between scientific and political discourse. For him, the importance of the Arabic and Islamic sources for understanding Jewish and Hebrew philosophy and poetry was grounded not only in scientific reasons

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(as for several German-Jewish orientalists who preceded him) but also in political factors connected to Zionism and to the return of Jews to the Land of Israel/ Palestine.

This article focuses on Abraham Shalom Yahuda's vision of Jewish modernization, tracing his criticism of and disputes with Jewish scholars and political leaders. It examines Jewish modernization from a new perspective that focuses on the broader intellectual and political project in which Yahuda was involved in for many years, together with other Sephardic intellectuals of his generation. Within this framework, the article investigates the special role that the Andalusian legacy played in the formation of Yahuda's political and cultural vision, one developed in a very particular social, political, and historical context at the turn of the twentieth century.

The first part of the article presents the crucial role that the Sephardic legacy had in modern Jewish discourse and in the Arab *al-Nahda* circles; the second traces Yahuda's intellectual biography; and the third focuses on Yahuda's critique of some of the leading trends in the Jewish scientific and political discourse of his time, and on his alternative political and cultural vision for Jewish modernization and Zionism.

1 Sephardic Legacy and Jewish Modernization

The return to the Golden Age of Muslim Spain as a symbolic, real, or imagined space played a crucial role in fin-de-siècle Jewish discourse. It would be hard to overstate its significance in modern Jewish discourse and in the process of reshaping Jewish and Hebrew culture. It emerged as a controversial idea that embodied conflicting notions of time and space, opposing claims of ownership of narratives and territories, and very different emphases on cultural and intellectual continuities.

Firstly, medieval Spain/Andalusia had a prominent role in the development of the scientific and literal work of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* circles. The cultural legacy of the Jews of Spain was seen as a rich soil from which to develop and modernize Jewish culture and identity. For instance in their writings, Jewish historians like Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), Moritz Güdemann (1835–1918) and Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) among others sought in Muslim Spain historical models that they and their Jewish contemporaries might emulate. One of the prominent elements of the Jewish enlightenment movement, at least in its early incarnations, was the attempt to justify the affiliation of Jews to European culture and society. At the heart of the fascination of these Jewish intellectuals with Muslim

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Spain was the premise that Jewish modernization processes were ineluctably bound to Western culture and to European civilization.[1]

Ismar Schorsch described these phenomena as the age of the Sephardic supremacy:

> Islamic civilization had fertilized Judaism with the philosophy and science of the Hellenic world, and that link was vital to the process of Westernizing Judaism in the nineteenth century. The Sephardic mystique not only provided emancipated Jews with a source of pride and an instrument of rebellion, but also enabled them to recover a classical heritage in common with German culture. On one level, it was the Jewish equivalent of what one historian has called "the tyranny of Greece over Germany." If our analysis has proven anything, it is that a literate German Jew was as likely to venerate the Sephardim as a Wilhelm von Humboldt the Greeks (…) Paradoxically, the contact with Islam had made Judaism part of the Western world.[2]

The interest of European-based scholars and researchers in Sephardic heritage deepened and spread during the second half of the nineteenth century, focusing on the national and Hebrew dimensions of this legacy. In this context, special attention was given to the Hebrew works of the Jewish poets and philosophers of that period, and their symbolic and actual connections to Zion were highlighted. Anthologies and new revised editions of Jewish works of medieval Spain—Hebrew poetry, philosophy, and religious works—were published in Europe, alongside much scientific and interpretative research.[3] However, the research of these Jewish scholars paid little or no attention to the considerable influence of Arabic language and culture on the writing of Jews in Spain.[4] While Hebrew works (mainly poetry) were given prominence, Arabic works (especially in Judeo-Arabic) were ignored. Even the great Jewish works that were originally composed

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1 Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Progress and its Discontents: The Struggles of Jewish Intellectuals with Modernity* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2010) [Hebrew]; Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History from Antiquity to the Present* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991) [Hebrew]; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Orientalism, Jewish Studies, and Israeli Society," *Jama'ah* 3 (1998): 34–61 [Hebrew]; Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardi Supremacy," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34, 1 (1989): 47–66; Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe, eds., *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From Al-Andalus to the Haskalah* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

2 Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardi Supremacy," 66.

3 Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries since 1942," in *Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies,* ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 327–362.

4 Rina Drory, *Initial Contact of Jewish Literature with Arabic Literature in the Tenth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988) [Hebrew]; Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Yuval Evri and Almog Behar, "Between East and West: Controversies over the Modernization of Hebrew Culture in the Works of Shaul Abdallah Yosef and Ariel Bension," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 295–311.

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in Arabic, such as Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* or Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*, were interpreted and studied mainly in their Hebrew translations, with almost no attention paid to the Arabic originals.[5]

Historians of this period claim that this behavior was part of a broader trend to distance Judaism from the East. This trend was manifested, both explicitly and implicitly, in some of the research works of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.[6] Many leading Jewish scholars and researchers in these circles emphasized the Western character of Judaism while ignoring or playing down its Oriental characteristics, including the role of Arabic language and culture in the Jewish cultural heritage of medieval Spain.[7]

But the memory of Andalusia was not confined to Jewish Europe: it also featured in the fin-de-siècle Arabic *al-Nahda* movement, and gained much prominence as a model of a glorious Arab past to be revived. During this period, towards the end of the Ottoman Era, Yahuda and several other Sephardic intellectuals were members of both the Hebrew revival movement and the *Nahda*, at a time when the two were not yet seen to be contradictory or incompatible.[8] Indeed, the Arabic-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire were home to significant processes of Jewish modernization and a renaissance of Hebrew language and culture. In addition to the *Nahda*, and its revival of Arabic language and culture, Yahuda and his peers were also inspired by the *Tanzimat*, the Ottoman political and cultural reformation. The involvement of Yahuda in both Hebrew and Arabic revival movements is an important factor for understanding his views on the cultural and political connections between Arabs and Jews, and his call to re-establish the Andalusian Judeo-Muslim bond as the basis for joint Arab and Jewish modernization.

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5 Yuval Evri, *Paneha ha-merubot ve-ha-mishtanot shel ha-'sfaradiyut' be-mifneh ha-meah ha-'esrim* (Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 2014) [Hebrew]; Yuval Evri, "Translating the Arab-Jewish Tradition: From al-Andalus to Palestine/Land of Israel," in *Essays of the Forum Transregionale Studien* 1 (Berlin: Forum Transregionale Studien, 2016): 17–23. Yosef Tobi, *Proximity and Distance: Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetry* (Leiden: Brill 2004).

6 Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Progress and its Discontents: The Struggles of Jewish Intellectuals with Modernity* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2010) [Hebrew]; Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardi Supremacy," 47–66.

7 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Orientalism, Jewish Studies, and Israeli Society," *Jama'ah* 3 (1998): 34–61 [Hebrew]; Gil Anidjar, "Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the Zohar of Christian Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* (1996): 89–157.

8 Lital Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863–1914" (Ph.D. diss., UC Berkeley, 2007); Lital Levy, "The Nahda and the Haskala: A Comparative Reading of 'Revival' and 'Reform'," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16, no. 3 (2013): 300–316.

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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 Ottomanized intellectual elite; the *Nahda* movement; the Hebrew *Haskalah* circles; and European scholars and researchers who settled in Jerusalem.[9] It was within this complex and diverse intellectual world that he developed his unique approach, which combines between scientific work and political activism. Yahuda return to the Arabic historical sources and Judeo-Islamic texts not only as a base to reshaping the Hebrew and Jewish culture but also as a cultural and political model for Arab-Jewish coexistence in Palestine/Land of Israel. Therefore, as we shall see in the next section, his biography shaped his perception and vision regarding the Sephardic legacy's role in modernizing Jewish culture and establishing the Jewish settlement in Palestine/Land of Israel.

2 Intellectual Biography

Abraham Shalom Yahuda was a prolific researcher, translator, and manuscript collector, whose intellectual activities spanned many geographical areas (including Jerusalem, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Berlin, London, New York and Madrid) and intellectual disciplines (philology, Jewish history, Oriental studies, biblical criticism, and Islamic studies).

Yahuda was born in Jerusalem into a Jewish family of Baghdadi and German origin.[10] 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.[11] By the time Yahuda left for Europe at the age of 18, he had already published two books and several articles about the connection between Arabic literature and poetry and Jewish and Hebrew culture.

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9 Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brotherhood* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Salim Tamari, *Mountain Against Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "The Possibility of Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 1 (2014): 43–61.

10 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 (2012); online at https://cmy.revues.org/1974 (accessed April 10, 2017).

11 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.

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In Germany, he took Semitic studies at Heidelberg and Frankfurt Universities, and 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-language commentary on Ibn Paquda's *Al-hidāja ʾilā farāʾiḍ al-qulūb*.[12] From 1904 to 1914, Yahuda was a lecturer at the Berlin *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Higher Institute for Jewish Studies), and from 1915 to 1920 he was the chair of the Rabbinical Language and Literature at the University of Madrid.[13] At the end of this year, Yahuda travelled to Jerusalem in order to begin preparations for his return to Palestine/Land of Israel, after receiving an offer for 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 regarding the Arab question. He decided to reject the offer of a professorship at the Hebrew University, and returned to Europe.[14] He spent the following 20 years travelling in search of rare manuscripts and acquired a valuable collection of books and manuscripts, while also lecturing at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Heidelberg, and at the Royal Asiatic Society of London.

During this period, Yahuda published numerous articles, essays and books. His most famous book was on the influence of the ancient Egyptian language on the biblical text, particularly the stories related to the exodus from Egypt. His main argument presumed that the Bible was composed around the time of the biblical Exodus from Egypt, nearly in line with traditional Jewish chronology. The German version, *Die Sprache des Pentateuch in ihren Beziehungen zum Aegyptischen*, was published in 1929, and was followed in 1933 by an English version, *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian*. His books were the subject of international debates in orientalist and biblical criticism circles. In 1942, Yahuda moved to New York to became a professor at the New School for Social Research, where he remained until his death in 1951.

12 His dissertation was published in German: *Prolegomena zu einer erstmaligen Herausgabe des Kitāb al-hidāja ʾilā farāʾiḍ al-qulūb (ḥovot ha-levavot) von Bachja ibn Josef ibn Paqūda aus dem Andalus, nebst einer größeren Textbeilage* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1904).

13 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 favor of the situation of the Jews in Palestine during World War I.

14 Evri, *Paneha ha-merubot ve-ha-mishtanot*, 73–80.

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During his early years in Jerusalem, Yahuda was part of the "Jerusalemite group,"[15] whose members also included Yosef Meyuchas (1868–1942),[16] Yitzhak Yehezkel Yahuda (1863–1941), David Yellin (1863–1942), and Shmuel Rafaelovitz-Rafaeli (1866–1923). This group had an important role during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, developing an alternative model of Hebrew revival and modernization that was based on a return to the Arab-Jewish Andalusian legacy, and was very different from the dominant ideas held by the Jewish *Haskalah* and Hebrew revival movement and European Zionist settlers.[17] Its members saw in the Jewish return to the Land of Israel the potential for renewing an Arab-Jewish cultural partnership. They pointed out "historical examples of Jewish-Arab cultural collaboration," and emphasized the "Jewish poetry in medieval Arab centers (…) poems of Israel in the land of Ishmael."[18] As Berlovitz puts it:

> This group of Jerusalemite scholars is a protest against the members of the First Aliyah: against their ignorance of this land; against their attempts to impose European culture exclusively; and against their lack of consideration and their arrogance towards local Jews and local Eastern culture. This counter-movement sought a response to the First Aliyah, proposing instead an Eastern national culture, and an original Jewish culture here in Semite lands.[19]

This program was based on the connection between the Sephardim in Palestine/Land of Israel and the Sephardic heritage of *al-Andalus*, and featured the present-day Sephardim as bearers of the legacy of Spain[20] and as its ideal interpret-

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15 The designation of these writers, researchers, and translators in research as "the Jerusalemite group," which became widely accepted, is in itself problematic, creating a localization of a much wider project. Although most of these individuals were indeed native Jerusalemites, and worked contemporaneously in the city at times, most of them moved on to, and worked in other places too, and formed a broad ideology regarding Jewish nationalism and modern Jewish culture.

16 Meyuchas proposed Arabic as a basis for popular and children's literature, which were so lacking in Hebrew that there had not been a living, spoken Hebrew language for many generations. See Yitzhak Bezalel, *You Were Born Zionists: The Sephardim in Eretz Israel in Zionism and the Hebrew Revival during the Ottoman Period* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2008) [Hebrew].

17 For more on the group, see Yaffa Berlovitz, "The Beginnings of Literature in Eretz Yisrael and its Affinities with the Poetry of Spain: A Proposed Model of Jewish-Arab Culture," *Bikoret ve-Parshanut* 32 (1998): 95–110 [Hebrew]; Gil Yardeni, *Hebrew Journalism in Eretz Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1969) [Hebrew]; Evri, *Paneha ha-merubot ve-ha-mishtanot*, 60–80.

18 Berlovitz, "The Beginnings of Literature in Eretz Yisrael," 100.

19 Berlovitz, "The Beginnings of Literature in Eretz Yisrael," 99–100.

20 As against its appropriation by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Europe.

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ers.[21] This unique approach was particularly visible in their translation works. During their five decades of intellectual activity (from the 1890s until the middle of the twentieth century), the members of the group translated a significant corpus of texts into Hebrew from several languages, but mainly from Arabic. Their translation work included a wide spectrum of practices beyond the common inter-lingual one[22] and reflected a variety of manifestations of translation, including literary translation, cultural translation (mainly through ethnographic work), and translation of traditions (mainly folklore and oral tradition). The prominent role of translation in their intellectual work was largely a result of both direct and indirect affiliation with the Sephardic/Andalusian heritage. The medieval Sephardic scholars served as inspirational role models, due to the prominent role that translation had in their world too. By adapting this intellectual model to the context of Palestine/Land of Israel at the turn of the twentieth century, this group promoted translation from Arabic as a fundamental instrument in the project of constructing modern Hebrew culture. Although Yahuda left Jerusalem when he was 18, his involvement in this group had a crucial impact on his scientific and political views during his entire life.

Yahuda was also part of a larger Sephardic scholarly world that Cohen and Stein describe as:

> a world of Judeo-Spanish letters that stretched from Jerusalem to Vienna, Livorno to Cairo, Adrianople to Ruschuk, and Sofia to Sarajevo but whose center of gravity lay somewhere between the Ottoman port cities of Salonica, Izmir, and Istanbul (…) at mid 19th century, the vast majority of these individuals were still subjects of a reforming Ottoman state.[23]

Like other scholars from this unorganized collective—including Solomon Rosanes (1862–1938), Abraham Galante (1873–1961) and Joseph Nehama (1880–1971)—Yahuda produced wide-ranging scholarship on the history and traditions

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21 Such sentiments can be found in Avraham Shalom Yahuda, *ʿEver wa-ʿArav: ʾOsef mehkarim u-maʾamarim* (New York: Ogen, 1946) [Hebrew], 70–88, and David Yellin, *Hebrew Poetry in Spain*, vol. 3, *Writings of David Yellin* (Jerusalem: Weiss Press, 1975), 1–75.

22 Here I draw upon the rich scholarly literature published over the last two decades on different uses of "translation" as an analytical concept in different theoretical contexts beyond the boundaries of the literary field, for example in 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); and Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

23 Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 351.

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of the Sephardim, a result of both his commitment and his intimate familiarity with the source materials.

The connection between Arabic and Islamic traditions on the one hand, and Jewish traditions on the other, was at the center of the extensive scientific work that Yahuda began after his arrival in Germany in 1895. He was trained in Semitic studies and published dozens of articles and books on the subject, emphasizing the Islamic influence on Jewish thought and culture. He had a special affinity for the Andalusian legacy, seeing it as a scientific and cultural model independent of its place of origin. In his private letters and memoirs, as I will show immediately, he described the significant influence that the Andalusian intellectual legacy had on his intellectual life.[24]

This influence was due in part to his affiliation with the orientalist community in Germany, especially the scholarly circles that emphasized the connections between Islam and Judaism. These Jewish scholars had become experts in Islamic studies mainly due to their desire to understand their own Jewish culture.

Yahuda was directly and indirectly influenced by the work of these Jewish scholars and orientalists, including Abraham Geiger (1810 – 1874), Gustav Weil (1808 – 1889) and Moritz Steinschneider (1816 – 1907).[25] Indeed, the great Islamic scholar Ignaz Goldziher (1850 – 1921) was the most influential figure for the young Yahuda, guiding him through his first years in the academic world. Yet despite the influence of their scientific approach on his work, Yahuda was also critical of the Jewish orientalist approach toward Jewish culture in general, and toward Sephardic Arab-Jewish culture in particular. This included people like Chaim Brody (1868 – 1942), Abraham Berliner (1833 – 1915), Abraham Harkavy (1835 – 1919), who were engaged in republishing scholarly editions of renowned Hebrew Spanish poets, as well as encouraging research and study of the field. Yahuda differed from them in his relation and affiliation to Arabic language and culture, which was for him not just a subject for historical study, but also an integral part of contemporary Jewish existence and of the future of the Jewish people in Palestine/Land of Israel. In the next section, we will examine some of Yahuda's critical arguments vis-à-vis those Jewish orientalists in particular and scholars of his generation in general.

24 Yahuda describes his affinity for the Andalusian heritage in his collected essays *ʿEver wa-ʿArav.* All the English translations of quotations from this collection, as well as from all other Hebrew sources in this article, are my own.

25 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.

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3 Between East and West—Disputes Over the Characteristics of Jewish Culture

In one of his early articles, written while he was still 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.[26]

In his well-articulated critique of the scientific approach that shaped the work of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* circles, Yahuda emphasized the importance of the Arabic language. In their approach to the materials from Golden Age Spain, he claimed, these scholars ignored the prominent role that Arabic language and culture had played in that heritage. Without understanding that intertwined connection, one could not fully grasp the whole picture. As he explains in one of his articles:

> Our authors 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 Mendelssohn 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.[27]

Yahuda emphasizes the ideological motives behind the discourse of the Jewish scholars. He interprets their approach as a cultural and political stance regarding Jewish modernization and the essence of Jewish identity and culture. In a private letter sent in 1899 to his cousin, David Yellin (1863–1941), Yahuda argued that the European Jewish scholars were trying to transfer Judaism into Western civilization, against its true nature:

26 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "Our Rabbi Saʿadiyah Gaon and the Arabic Environment," in Yahuda, *ʿEver wa-ʿArav,* 70–88.
27 Yahuda, *ʿEver wa-ʿArav*, 136–137.

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> Truly, more than our literature needs Europe-ism it needs Eastern-ism. 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 only these people knew our Eastern literature and recognized our Eastern culture that developed with our prophets, then they would not turn to the new, Western, Aryan European culture, so strange to our cultural spirit. Our Eastern culture was the fruit of human emotion…[28]

In this quotation we find the basis of Yahuda's critique of the European Jewish scholars of his time. For him, the very essence of Jewish culture is Eastern; forcibly relocating Judaism to European culture goes against this essence. Yahuda wrote this letter a few years after his move to Europe, during his first years as a university student in Germany. During these formative years, he was exposed to the Jewish *Wissenschaft* circles of his time as well as to Jewish students who arrived from the Russian empire to study at the German universities. These encounters had a crucial impact on Yahuda's views regarding the Western *Haskalah* and other Jewish enlightenment movements. During this period, he was also introduced to the first Zionist groups in Germany and became involved in their activities.

Throughout his involvement in Zionist circles, he expressed similar concerns regarding the prevailing attitude toward 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 already realized the major impact that the Arabs would have on the Jewish plans to return to Palestine.[29] 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; Herzl argued that he was planning to turn directly to the superpowers, and that there was no need to deal directly with the Arabs.[30]

Many years later, Yahuda described this dismissive attitude as one of the roots of the emergence of the Arab question in Palestine/Land of Israel and of the lengthy Zionist-Arab conflict:

28 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "Letter to David Yellin" (October 1899).

29 Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "The Possibility of Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41 (2014): 1 – 9.

30 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "Herzl's Attitude towards the Arab Question," *Hed ha-mizrah* 10 (1949): 10 – 11 [Hebrew].

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> I was the youngest delegate at the Congress. My main purpose in attending was to continue my talks with Herzl on the Arabs of Eretz Yisrael, which I had initiated with him in London. I tried to prove to Herzl that we had to convince the Arabs of the benefits to be accrued for them and the country as a result of our return to Zion, and to forge ties of friendship and mutual understanding with their leaders. His associates discounted my opinions, but time proved me right. We neglected the task of explaining ourselves to our neighbors; thereby leaving their hearts open to the seeds of hate sowed by troublemakers.[31]

Yahuda interpreted this event as another example of the arrogant attitude held by the European Jews towards the Arabs, which had a crucial effect on the creation of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine/Land of Israel. He emphasized the importance of involving the Arab majority in the Zionist process, and criticized the Zionist leaders who came from Europe for their dismissiveness toward the local Arab population.

Traces of Yahuda's arguments regarding Jewish culture and modernization can even be found in his rich and diverse scientific work. One of his major scientific works was an edition of *Al-hidāja ʾilā farāʾiḍ al-qulūb* ("The proper guidance to the religious duties of the heart"), transliterated from the Arabic and published in 1912. Authored by the eleventh-century Andalusian Jewish thinker Bahya ibn Paquda, the fame of the *al-Hidāja* lies in its fine quality as one of the earliest systematic works on ethics and spirituality in Jewish tradition, as well as its strong connection with Islamic literature. The book was written in Arabic in Hebrew script, 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 an introduction about the Arabic and Islamic sources used by ibn Paquda, emphasizing the strong Islamic influence on this canonical Jewish text. Yahuda transliterated the book into Arabic script in order, as he says in the introduction, to make the work also accessible to modern Muslim scholars of the Orient.[32] In his review of the book published in 1917, Henry Malter pointed out that Yahuda's unique scholarly background, as well as his personal background and connections to the Arab world, played a crucial role in his work on the *Hidāja* :

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31 Quoted in Elie Eliachar, *Living with Jews* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 163.
32 For more information about Yahuda's book, see Henry Malter, "Yahuda's Edition of Bahya's Duties of the Heart," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 7, no. 3 (1917): 379–391; Saeko Yazaki, "Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Duties of Hearts: A.S. Yahuda and his Study of Judaism," in Josef W. Meri, ed., *Jewish-Muslim Relations in Past and Present: A Kaleidoscopic View*, Series: Studies on the Children of Abraham (Brill: Leiden): 137–161.

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> 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 a 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.[33]

The importance of Arabic and Islamic influences on Jewish medieval thinkers and writers is similarly emphasized in Yahuda's other works on the Arab-Jewish intellectual legacy of that era, such as in his articles on Saʿadia Gaon.

More broadly, Yahuda also adopted a very different approach to the research of Jewish history and culture from the one taken by leading researchers in the *Wissenschaft* circles, stressing the importance not only of European and Hebrew sources, but also of Islamic and Arabic historical sources. For instance, he published an article on the Andalusian-Jewish poet Hisdai Ben Yosef Hisdai (1040–1110), who wrote only in Arabic and who was well respected and well-documented in Arabic chronicles of the time. Yet Yahuda argues that because Hisdai wrote only in Arabic, his poems were not investigated by European scholars, and none were included in the new editions of the Spanish Hebrew Poets that were published in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.[34] Yahuda wrote his article as part of a larger project on the "Hebrew Spanish poets who sung in the Arabic language, that I wish to gather and collect from the works of the Arabs."[35] He used materials mainly from contemporary Arabic chronicles and from modern and medieval Arab scholars who wrote about Andalusian literature and poetry.

In this way, Yahuda emphasized the deep interconnection between the Jewish and the Arabic traditions. Reconnecting Judaism to the East and to the Judeo-Muslim traditions was for him a crucial step in modernizing Jewish culture. Yahuda began 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 Eastern-ism 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 (…)

33 Malter, "Yahuda's Edition," 380–381.

34 Yahuda, *ʿEver wa-ʿArav*, 118.

35 Ibid.

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> 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.[36]

Yahuda also continued to advocate the return to the Sephardic legacy and to the Judeo-Arabic tradition in his position as Professor at Madrid University (1914–1921). In his memoirs from this period, he recalls a battle to include Hebrew as obligatory language in Hispanic studies along with Arabic and Spanish:

> Upon being appointed chair I explicitly stipulated that Hebrew would be considered obligatory, as was Arabic, by the philosophy department, and that each student who wanted to obtain a doctorate in Hispanic culture also had to pass the Hebrew exam. And so it came that Madrid University was the first and only one in the world where Hebrew was considered an obligatory subject (…) When King Alfonso XIII asked me why I insisted on these terms, I explained that Hebrew culture had once been important in Spain because it grew and flourished there, reaching new heights and affecting Spanish learning, much as had Arabic culture.[37]

4 Conclusion

This article examined the work of Abraham Shalom Yahuda within a broader context of modernist models in Germany, Spain, and Palestine/Land of Israel, as well as the various intellectual networks in which he was active. It explored the possibilities he proposed in response to the modernist projects that were promoted by Jewish scholars in Europe which sought to reshape Jewish and Hebrew modernization through a process of Westernization and Europeanization. I traced Yahuda's approach towards the "Sephardic legacy" through his movement in time and space, from his childhood in Jerusalem, through the turn of the twentieth century in Germany, to his time in Madrid and in Palestine/Land of Israel. Along the way, his encounters with German orientalists, European *Wissenschaft* scholars, German and Russian Zionists, Sephardic intellectuals in Jerusalem, and Spanish scholars of Arab and Islamic culture all played their part in forming his ideas about the research of Jewish history and culture, about what was in his opinion the essential nature of Judaism and its relationship with the Arab world, and about the alternative, non-European models he proposed for Jewish modernization.

36 Yahuda, "Letter to David Yellin" (Abraham Shalom Yahuda Archive, Israel National Library).
37 Abraham Shalom Yahuda, "From My Memoirs," *Hed ha-Mizrah* 38 (July 1949): 3–5 [Hebrew].

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In response to the European- and Western-influenced models of the *Wissenschaft*, Yahuda promoted Eastern cultural and Judeo-Arabic traditions as the main vehicle to a Jewish transformation in modernity. He believed that Jewish modernization should embody a symbolic and actual return to the East, and re-establish the close relationship with Arabic language and culture. Yahuda viewed Jewish and Hebrew cultures as being rooted in the Arabic and Muslim traditions, due both to the historic ties between them and to the physical location of the Jewish homeland in Palestine/Land of Israel, in the Arab East. These views regarding the Eastern nature of Judaism were inseparable from his stance on Jewish nationalism and the Arab question, and on the growing division between Jews and Arabs in Palestine/Land of Israel.

To an extent, the models proposed by Yahuda were influenced by the German orientalist perspective on the intertwined nature of the Jewish and Muslim worlds, as well as on the importance of the philological angle. But over the years, he formulated a fundamental critique of the main ideas put forward by European Jewish intellectuals—such as Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952), Nahum Sokolov (1859–1936), Menachem Ussishkin (1863–1941)—for the modernization of Jewish studies and for the Zionist project in Palestine/Land of Israel. As an alternative, he proposed pathways that combined the renewal of Jewish culture with a reconnection to Arabic language, poetics, and style. These ideas reflected, among other things, Yahuda's own liminal position as one situated between East and West, between Hebrew and Arabic, and between Europe and Palestine. Within this context, we can read his intellectual activities in a formative moment in the renewal of Jewish society in Europe and Palestine/Land of Israel as a reflection of contested political and cultural options. Reviewing his work from the beginning of his activities in the nineteenth century through to the middle of the twentieth century reveals new, unfamiliar models of Jewish modern culture based on far broader cultural and political conceptions. They comprise fundamental questions like the affinity between the Hebrew and Arabic languages, the link between Jewish and Arab modernization, and the place of Jewish people between East and West.

This article seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about Jewish intellectual history at the turn of the twentieth century, by giving new prominence to intellectual circles and schools of thought which were previously unexplored and largely unknown. It reviews some of the options that Yahuda suggested (in terms of language, literature, and identity) for the formation of modern Jewish culture. These options were not pursued, and the lives and writings of Yahuda, as in the case of other Sephardic intellectuals of his generation,

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were subsequently omitted from the dominant national historiographies of the period.[38]

Returning to these options provides an opportunity to reinstate pathways for the study of Jewish history and the development of Jewish studies which offer different logics regarding its division in time (between the Middle Ages and the modern age) and in space (between West and East), and its division between different frameworks of knowledge and discourse. At a historical moment in the institutionalization of Jewish studies in Europe and Palestine/Land of Israel—which were based on binary distinctions between Hebrew and Arabic, tradition and modernity, West and East and secular and religious—Yahuda's approach offered alternative paths for Jewish and Hebrew studies based on Judeo-Muslim traditions and on a reconnection between Arabic and Hebrew cultures.

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38 For recent research on Sephardic scholarly work at the turn of the twentieth century, see: Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100, no. 3 (2010): 349–387; Evri and Behar, "Between East and West," 295–311; Lital Levy, *Jewish Writers in the Arab East*; Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writing on Identity, Politics, and Culture 1893–1958* (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2013).

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