lasting, and he goes down in the annals of Hebrew literature as one of it greatest pioneers.



FRAGMENT

Let Scripture be your Eden,
and the Arabs' books your paradise grove . . .

BLESSING FOR A WEDDING

Banish suffering
  and also wrath,
and the mute
  will break into song;

guide us on paths
  of righteous action—
and grant us the blessings
  of Aaron's sons.

DRINK, HE SAID

"Drink," he said, "don't drowse,
drink wine aged well in barrels,
near henna beds and aloes
  and roses mixed with myrrh—

in pomegranate groves
by grapevines and date palms,
with tender plants and saplings,
  and tamarisks in rows.

To the sound of coursing water,
the thrumming of the zither
accompanies the singers
  with reed-pipes and an oud.

All the trees there spread
with branches and fine fruit,
and every sort of bird
  sings among the leaves.

The pigeons coo and moan,
as though composing songs,
and turtle-doves respond
  as though they're playing flutes.

We'll drink along the beds
hedged about by lilies,
and drive away our sorrows
  with wine and songs of praise.

We'll eat the sweetest morsels,
and sip from studded bowls,
and act as though we're giants
  drinking from their casks.

Come morning I'll arise
and go to slaughter bulls,
choice, fattened creatures,
  cows and rams and calves.

Anointed then with oil,
we'll burn fragrant scents—
and before destruction's hour,
  live our lives in bliss."

"Silence!" I rebuked him.
"How could you propose this?
The Temple and God's footstool
  are held by unclean hands.

You're speaking like a fool
who chose the path of sloth;
and what you say is vain,
the talk of a buffoon.

You've left your meditation
on the Law of heaven;
you'd celebrate while jackals
roam on Zion's hills.

How could we drink wine
or even raise our eyes—
while we, now, are nothing,
detested and despised?"

THE WIFE OF DUNASH

(mid-tenth century)

This single poem by THE WIFE OF DUNASH Ben Labrat is all of her work that has come down to us. It is, so far as we know, the only poem by a woman in the entire medieval Hebrew canon. The poem's heading in manuscript explains that it was composed on the occasion of her husband's forced departure from Spain. The reasons for his leaving remain obscure, but the last line of the poem suggests that he fell out of favor with Hasdai Ibn Shaprut, the leader of Spanish Jewry and patron of the local Hebrew revival. Apart from these lines and the crisis they treat, we know nothing about the poet, not even her name. That said, the poem's restraint and quiet dignity, along with its tenderness and subtle complication of tone—melding affection, resentment, and above all a sense of acceptance of what seems to be a tragic fate—speak for her character. A relatively recent discovery, this gentle lyric was reconstructed from torn Geniza fragments by scholar Ezra Fleischer, who hailed it as "the first fully realized personal poem in the new Andalusian style." That it emerged at such an early stage of the poetry's evolution, and from the pen of a woman, makes the find all the more remarkable.

WILL HER LOVE REMEMBER?

Will her love remember his graceful doe,
her only son in her arms as he parted?
On her left hand he placed a ring from his right,
on his wrist she placed her bracelet.
As a keepsake she took his mantle from him,
and he in turn took hers from her.
Would he settle, now, in the land of Spain,
if its prince gave him half his kingdom?

Who said no two drops from clouds
would fall—cut from a single mold?
Who has gathered the wind in His fist
and bound the waters in His robe?

Who counts the ninety-nine screams
of mountain-goats giving birth on cliffs?
Who sends eagles to catch their young
and lift them up on wings?
Who makes serpents suddenly appear
to bite the wombs of deer?
Who creates the claps of thunder,
each with its path across the heavens?
Who prepares a course for storms—
a track for thunder's lightning? . . .

Who casts five occasions of fear
over five occasions of might?
Who in giant elephants wakens
terror of the mosquito's flight?
Who within the mysterious whale
arouses fear of the stickleback fish?
Who sends forth His word to show
that over all He is?
Who has hardened himself and thrived
against the One who rules?

Who hurls ruin upon the strong
lest in cruelty they lash out?
Who casts fright across the lion
before the Ethiopian gnat?
Who brings over the scorpion
terror of the spider's poison?
Who sends fear of swallows
into the falcon's eyes?
Who established the world's foundations
and set them beneath the skies?

YITZHAQ IBN KHALFOUN

(c. 965–after 1020)

A key transitional writer of the second generation, YITZHAQ IBN KHALFOUN was born in Spain, c. 965, to parents who had immigrated from North Africa. His father seems to have been supported by Shmu'el HaNagid's father, as was the young Yitzhaq himself. Later on HaNagid also became Yitzhaq's patron and friend, and the two exchanged poems in times of trouble. Ibn Khalfoun is often called the first professional Hebrew poet, that is, a poet who produced poems on demand for pay. His limiting role notwithstanding, he expanded the scope of the new Andalusian Hebrew poetry, introducing a fuller range of the Arabic elements and both a lither texture and lighter tone in his verse, which was far more personal and occasional than that of his predecessors. While Cordoba was his city, he traveled constantly in search of patrons and—judging from his sometimes barbed responses to his sponsors—wasn't always happy with the compensation he received or the promptness with which he was paid. His collected work is exclusively secular.

LOVE IN ME STIRS

Love in me stirs and I bound like a deer
just to see my lady's eyes.
Her mother, uncle, father, and brother
are gathered around her when I arrive.

I look but turn away, as though
she had never driven me wild,
afraid of them while I long for her—
like a woman, mourning her only child.

when he dies he lies with maggots,
repulsive to one and all;

so it's right that I wax elegiac
from time to time in my soul.

I QUARTERED THE TROOPS FOR THE NIGHT

I quartered the troops for the night in a fortress
which soldiers destroyed long ago,
and they fell asleep at its walls and foundations
while beneath us its masters slept on.

And I wondered . . . What had become
of the people who dwelled here before us?
Where were the builders and soldiers, the wealthy
and poor, the slaves and their lords—

the mourners and grooms, sons and fathers;
the bereaved and the women in labor?
Great nations had come in succession
in the course of months and years.

They settled across the back of the earth,
but rest in the heart of the ground—
their magnificent palaces turned into tombs,
their pleasant courts to dust,

and if they could lift their heads and emerge,
they'd take our lives and pleasure.
In truth, my soul, in truth and soon,
I'll be like them—and these sleepers.

LUXURIES EASE

Luxuries ease, but when trouble comes
people are plagued for the wealth they've accrued.
The peacock's tail is spectacular—
but it weighs him down on the day he's pursued.

WHY REPEAT THE SINS

Why repeat the sins
you know will make you sad
and not hold back from sinning
for sorrow—

like a dove whose brood was slaughtered
in the nest, and yet returns
over and over again
until she's taken?

AT THE TREASURY

On couches stretched out at the treasury,
where the guards' vigilance knows no relief,
you fell asleep without fear by the window
and time came through like a thief.

KNOW OF THE LIMBS

Know of the limbs embroidered with dust
and covered with ashen skin,
and in these graves see the power of kings
reduced to the powder of bone.

You whose souls on earth were exalted
will soon rise over all—
and be remembered in the world ever after
as a dream as it fades is recalled.

בְּעִתּוֹת עָצְבְּךָ — TAKE HEART

בְּעִתּוֹת עָצְבְּךָ חֲזַק לְבָבֶךָ,
וְאִם תַּעֲמֹד עֲלֵי שַׁעַר הַרְגָּה:
לְגֵר — מָאוֹר בְּטֶרֶם הַדְּעִיכָה,
וְלִכְפִירִים מְדַקְּרִים — שְׁאָגָה.

In times of sorrow, take heart, even though you stand at death's door: the candle flares up before it dies, and wounded lions roar.

עֲלֵיכֶם לְפוֹעֲלְכֶם — THE REWARD

עֲלֵיכֶם לְפוֹעֲלְכֶם לְיַשֵּׁר פְּעָלֵיכֶם —
וְלָכֶם יְהִי עָלָיו לְשַׁלֵּם גְּמוּלֵיכֶם.
וְאַל בַּעֲבוֹדָתוֹ תִּבָּלוּ יְמוֹתֵיכֶם,
אֲבָל עֵת עֲשׂוּ לָאֵל, וְעִתִּים עֲשׂוּ לָכֶם.
תְּנוּ לוֹ חֲצִי הַיּוֹם, וְחֶצְיוֹ לְמַעֲשֵׂיכֶם —
וְאַל תִּתְּנוּ פוּגַת לְיַיִן בְּלֵילֵיכֶם!
וְכַבּוּ מְאוֹר הַנֵּר וְאוֹרוּ בְּכוֹסֵיכֶם,
וְקוּצוּ בְּקוֹל שָׁרִים וְשִׁירוּ בְּנִבְלֵיכֶם.
וְאִם אֵין בְּקֶבֶר שִׁיר וְחֶמֶר וְחֶבֶר — הוֹי
פְּתָאִים, יְהִי זֶה חֶלְקְכֶם מֵעֲמָלֵיכֶם!

You owe it to your Maker to pursue a righteous course, and He must give you your just deserts. But do not pass all your days in His service: set aside a time for God and times for yourselves. Give half the day to Him, half to your own needs – and then give wine no respite all night long! Put out the candle light – let your goblets shine instead. Scorn the voice of singers – let your jugs sing for you. Since you will not find wine, song, or company in the grave – let this, O fools, be your reward for all your labours!

מֵת אָב — WINTER WINE SONG

מֵת אָב וּמֵת אֱלוּל וּמֵת חֻמָּם,
גַּם נֶאֱסַף תִּשְׁרִי וּמֵת עִמָּם.
בָּאוּ יְמֵי הַקֹּר, וְהַתְּיִרוֹשׁ
אָדַם, וְקוֹלוֹ בַּכְּלִי דָמָם.
לָכֵן, יְדִידִי, סֹב אֱלֵי רֵעִים,
כָּל אִישׁ וְאִישׁ יַעַשׂ אֲשֶׁר זָמָם.

Av[1] has died and Elul has died, and so has their warmth. Tishri, too, has died and been gathered to them. The cold days have come, the must has grown red and is now silent in its barrel.[2] Therefore, my friend, go find companions – and let each man fulfil his own desire! They said: 'Behold the

1. Av, Elul and Tishri are the autumn months. 2. After fermentation is complete.

אָמְרוּ: 'חֲזֵה עָבִים בְּהַגְשִׁימָם
וּשְׁמַע שְׁמֵי מָרוֹם בְּהַרְעִימָם
וּרְאֵה כְּפוֹר וּלְשׁוֹן מְדוּרָה — זֶה
יֵרֵד וְזֶה יַעַל וְיִתְרוֹמָם.
קוּמָה שְׁתֵה בַּכּוֹס, וְשׁוּב וּשְׁתֵה
בַּכַּד, וּבַלַּיִל וְגַם יוֹמָם.'

clouds pouring down, listen to the heavens thundering. See the frost and the tongues of fire: one falls down as the others rise and swirl. Arise, drink from the cup, and then again out of the jug; drink night and day!'

מְאָדָם בְּמַרְאֵהוּ — WINE

מְאָדָם בְּמַרְאֵהוּ וְעָרֵב לְשׁוֹתֵהוּ
וּמָזוּג בְּאַסְפַּמְיָא — וְזִכְרוֹ אֱלֵי הֹדּוּ.
וְחַלָּשׁ בְּאַגָּנָיו, אֲבָל בַּעֲלוֹתוֹ אֶל
רָאשִׁים — אֲזַי יְרֵדֵּה בְרָאשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יֵרֵדוּ.
וְשִׁכּוּל אֲשֶׁר דָּמָיו מְסוּכִים בְּדִמְעוֹתָיו —
יְגוֹנָיו בְּדַם אֶשְׁכּוֹל יְנוּסוּן וְיִדַּדוּ.
כְּאֵלּוּ יְדִידִים, עֵת יְסֻבּוּם אֲשִׁישׁוֹתָיו
מְיַד לְיָד, גּוֹרָל עֲלֵי יַהֲלֹם יַדּוּ.

Red to the eye, sweet to the drinker, it is poured out in Spain but its bouquet reaches India. When it is in the bowls, it is feeble; but once it goes to the head, it holds sway over swaying heads.[1] The wretch whose heart's blood is mixed with his tears banishes his sorrows with the grape's blood. As the goblets make the rounds, passing from hand to hand, it seems as if the friends are casting lots for a diamond.

רְאֵה יַסְמִין — THE JASMINE

רְאֵה יַסְמִין אֲשֶׁר בַּדָּיו יְרֻקִּים
כְּמוֹ פִטְדָה וְעָלָיו וַאֲגַפָּיו,
וְצִצָּיו כַּבְּדֹלָחִים לְבָנִים,
וְכָאֹדֶם מְאָדָמִים סְעָפָיו —
כְּמוֹ עֻלֵּם לְבֶן פָּנִים וְשׁוֹפֵךְ
דְּמֵי אִישִׁים נְקִיֵּי כָף בְּכַפָּיו.

Look at the jasmine, whose branches, leaves, and stems are green as chrysolite, whose flowers are white as rock crystal, whose tendrils are red as carnelian – like a white-faced youth whose hands are shedding the blood of innocent men.

1. Or, according to another reading, 'it rules the heads of states'.

For the weak poem kills the soul of its author—
while he's still alive, it dies;

where the excellent in memory endures,
like the new moon, month by month in its rise.

I'M PRINCE TO THE POEM

I'm prince to the poem, my slave,
I'm harp to the court musicians,
my song is a turban for viziers' heads,
a crown for kings in their kingdoms:

and here I've lived just sixteen years,
and my heart is like eighty within them.

PROLOGUE TO *THE BOOK OF GRAMMAR*

A poem of glory and power I'll offer my Maker
who set the heavens on high with His span,
because He created the language and mouth of man
and gave them the crown of honor and splendor,
causing their growth in knowledge of wonder the Lord
works in the world and the world-to-come.
Declared the Spaniard Solomon Ben Judah the Small,
who culled for his people the holy tongue:
Examining the Lord's congregation with all my soul,
I saw the exiled remnant escaped,
found among them the sacred speech destroyed,
almost wholly in ruins or erased,
given over to languages distant from Hebrew
and utterly strange to the lips of the Jews,
half of whom speak in the manner of Edom,
and half with the darkening tongue of Qedar,

in their hopelessness drowning, engulfed by the deepening whirl,
in their ignorance sinking within it like stone,
joining pain for my people to pain through my bones—
trapped like a fire burning inside me.
Knowing the foolish were lost in their groaning, I moaned
in my heart like a harp or the harp-like sea.
Lacking all vision, living far from their Law,
they couldn't fathom the simplest inscription.
My Lord, who could save the blind in their drowning?
Who could bring their ship into port?
"Now that your eyes are clear," my heart spoke out,
"you see that your people are lost . . .
Only you can guide them—give voice to mouths
gone mute. Surely the Lord will reward you."
Pushed, I cowered, seeing that I was still young
and easily given to anger and fury:
Reason in youth is dismissed categorically;
what can a boy of nineteen really do?
So said my heart, when a dream like a secret came through me,
and I heard a voice from the city call me—
taunting my spirit—during the night as it told me:
The hand of the Lord will surely strengthen you
under your burden; your youth doesn't excuse you.
It isn't the elders who hold up the kingdom.
Viewing this image my confidence grew; and I knew
very well in my heart what the Lord
wanted, and set my mind to make of this treatise a

xyst as fine as my hand was able,
yearning to forge through this book of our grammar a
zone of repair for the language of Cain . . .

THEY ASKED ME AS THOUGH THEY WERE MYSTIFIED

They asked me as though they were mystified:
Is it true your friend's hands are like clouds?
And I told them: They were tied for being too open,
and for goodness of heart of hunger he died.

SEE THE SUN

See the sun gone red toward evening
as though it were wearing a crimson dress,
stripping the edges of north and south
and, in violet, lining the wind from the west:

and the earth—left in its nakedness—
takes refuge in the shadow of night, and rests,
and then the skies go black, as though
covered in sackcloth, for Yequti'el's death.

ON LEAVING SARAGOSSA

My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth,
my throat is parched with pleading,
my heart is loud, my mind confused
with pain and continual grieving.
My sorrow swells and will not bear
sleep's gift to my eyes:
How long will this rage and yearning
like fire inside me burn?

Who could I turn to for help,
who could I tell of my plight?
If only someone would offer me comfort,
someone have mercy, take hold of my hand,
I'd pour out my heart before him
and manage to reach but the edge of my grief—
though maybe in putting my sorrow to words
my heart's rushing would find release.

You who seek my peace, come near—
and hear the roar of my heart like the sea.
If your heart has grown hard it will soften,
faced with the hate that faces me.

How could you call me alive,
when you know of my distress;
is it nothing to live among people
who can't tell their right hand from left?

I'm buried, but not in a graveyard,
in the coffin of my own home;
I suffer with neither father nor mother,
indigent, young, and alone—
on my own without even a brother,
not a friend apart from my mind:
I mix my blood with my tears,
and my tears into my wine.

I'll be consumed in my thirst
before my thirst for friendship is quenched,
as though the sky and its hosts were arrayed
between me and all that I crave.
I'm treated here as a stranger, despised—
as though I were living with ostriches,
caught between impostors and fools
who think their hearts have grown wise.
One hands you venom to drink,
another strokes you with words
and lies in wait in his heart,
addressing you: "Please, my lord . . .";
people whose fathers were not fit
to be dogs to my flock of sheep—
their faces have never known blushing,
unless they were painted with crimson cheeks.

They're giants in their own eyes,
grasshoppers here in mine.
They quarrel with all my teachings and talk,
as though I were speaking Greek.
"Speak," they carp, "as the people speak,
and we'll know what you have to say"—
and now I'll break them like dirt or like straw,
my tongue's pitchfork thrust into their hay.

WINTER WITH ITS INK

Winter with its ink of showers and rain,
with its pen of lightning and palm of clouds,
  wrote a letter of purple and blue
    over the beds of the garden.

No artist in his cunning could measure
  his work beside it—and so,
    when earth longed for the sky
it embroidered the spread of its furrows like stars.

THE GARDEN

Its beads of dew hardened still,
  He sends his word to melt them;
  they trickle down the grapevine's stem
    and its wine seeps into my blood.

The beds blossom, and open before us
  clasps of their whitening buds,
  sending a fragrance up to our faces,
    as we wander out to the myrtles.

As you go, each flower lends you a petal—
  a wing so you won't crush it;
  and the sun's face glows like a bride
    whose jewels shine in her glow.

Through its circuit, daily, she glides,
  though no one at all pursues her—
  and so we think it a king's chariot
    drawn by galloping horses.

As it passes over the garden you notice
  the beds now coated in silver,
  and then when the day declines it lines
    their border with a shimmering gold.

In its sinking, soon, you find yourself thinking
  it's bowing, before its Maker;
  as it swiftly sets it seems to be veiled
    in darkening red by the Lord.

THE FIELD

The storm-clouds lowed above us like bulls.
Autumn was angry, and its face darkened
and put them to chase like wisps of wool,
  like a ship's captain blasting its horn.

The heavens went black in a thickening mist,
as the morning stars and their light were absorbed,
then the sun with its wing whisked them across
  the earth until they split and it burst.

The wind beat at the sheets of rain,
and the clouds were cut into threads reaching down
into the world below—drenching
  ridges, preparing the furrows for sowing.

On the hills, hidden grasses emerged
like secrets a man had long withheld;
all winter the clouds wept until suddenly
  life again swept through the trees of the field.

THE BEE

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is one . . .
that ye remember and do all my commandments

Take, little bee, your time with your song,
  in your flight invoking the prayer called "Hear"—
declaring and stretching "the Lord is *one*,"
  raising on high the hum of *remember*
to He who put honey under your tongue
  and gave you the gall to drive out foes.

זֶה הוּא נְעִים תֵּבֵל – קַח חֶלְקְךָ
מֵנוּ כְּאֵיל מִלּוּאִים, חֵקֶךְ
שִׁימָה מְנָת רָאשֵׁי עַם צַדְּקֶךָ:
אַל תֶּחֱשֶׂה לִמְצֹץ שָׂפָה וְרֹק,
עַד תֶּאֱחֹז חֶקֶךְ – חָזֶה וְשׁוֹק!

These are the delights of the world; take your part as [did the priests] from the ram of installation. Always allot yourself the very portion that was your leaders'[1] due; do not stop sipping the moist lips until you hold your rightful portion – the breast and the thigh!

תַּאֲוַת לִבִּי — THE TREACHEROUS FAWN

תַּאֲוַת לִבִּי וּמַחְמַד עֵינַי –
עֹפֶר לְצִדִּי וְכוֹס בִּימִינִי!

My heart's desire and my eyes' delight: the hart beside me and a cup in my right hand!

רַבּוּ מְרִיבִי – וְלֹא אֶשְׁמָעֵם.
בּוֹא, הַצְּבִי, וַאֲנִי אַכְנִיעֵם,
וּזְמַן יְבַלֶּם וּמָוֶת יִרְעֵם.
בּוֹא, הַצְּבִי, קוּם וְהַבְרִיאֵנִי
מִצּוּף שְׂפָתֶךָ וְהַשְׂבִּיעֵנִי!

Many denounce me for loving, but I pay no heed. Come to me, fawn, and I shall vanquish them. Time will consume them and death will shepherd them away. Oh come to me, fawn, let me feast on the nectar of your lips until I am satisfied.

לָמָּה יְנִיאוּן לִבִּי, לָמָּה?
אִם בַּעֲבוּר חֵטְא וּבְגָלַל אַשְׁמָה
אֶשְׁגֶּה בְיָפְיֵךְ – אֲדֹנָי שָׁמָּה!
אַל יֵט לִבָּךְ בְּנִיב מְעַנֵּנִי,
אִישׁ מַעֲקַשִּׁים, וּבוֹא נַסֵּנִי.

Why, why would they discourage me? If there be any sin or guilt in being ravished by your beauty – let the Lord be my judge![2] Do not let your heart be swayed by the words of my tormentor, that obstinate man. Oh, come put me to the test!

נִפְתָּה – וַנָּקָמְנוּ אֶלֵי בֵּית אִמּוֹ,
וַיֵּט לְעֹל סֻבָּלִי אֶת שִׁכְמוֹ,
לַיְלָה וְיוֹמָם אֲנִי רַק עִמּוֹ.
אֶפְשַׁט בְּגָדָיו – וַיַּפְשִׁיטֵנִי,
אִינַק שְׂפָתָיו – וַיֵּינִיקֵנִי.

He was lured and we went to his mother's house. There he bent his back to my heavy yoke. Night and day I alone was with him. I took off his clothes and he took off mine, I sucked at his lips and he suckled me.

1. Lit. 'the heads of the righteous people'; the breast and the leg of the ram of installation were the perquisite of Aaron and his descendants the priests (Exodus 26.27–28).
2. Lit. 'the Lord is there'.

וְגוֹר מֵהַזְּמָן, כִּי מַתְנוֹתָיו
כְּרֹאשׁ פֶּתֶן מְעַט נֹפֶת תְּקָרְבוֹ,
וְהַשְׁאֵ נַפְשְׁךָ בֹּקֶר בְּטוּבוֹ –
וְיַחֵל תַּהֲפוּכוֹתָיו בְּעַרְבּוֹ!

Fortune: her favours are like the venom of serpents, spiced with honey. But let your soul deceive itself and accept her goodness in the morning, even though you know that she will be treacherous at night.

שְׁתֵה בַיּוֹם – עַד יִפֶּן, וְשֶׁמֶשׁ
עָלֵי כַסְּפוֹ יְצַפֶּה אֶת זְהָבוֹ,
וּבַלַּיְלָה – עַד יִבְרַח כְּשָׁחוֹר,
וְיַד שַׁחַר מְאַחֵז אֶת עֲקֵבוֹ.

Drink all day long, until the day wanes and the sun coats its silver with gold; and all night long, until the night flees like a Moor, while the hand of dawn grips its heel.

דַּדֵּי יָפַת תֹּאַר — YOUR RIGHTFUL PORTION

דַּדֵּי יְפַת תֹּאַר לַיִל חֲבֹק,
וּשְׂפַת יְפַת מַרְאֶה יוֹמָם נְשֹׁק!

Caress the breasts of the lovely girl at night, and kiss the lips of the beautiful girl all day long!

וּגְעַר בְּכָל מֵרִיב, יוֹעֵץ לְפִי
דַרְכּוֹ, וְקַח לֹשֶׁר נִמְצָא בְּפִי:
אֵין הַחַיּוֹת רַק עִם יַלְדֵי יָפִי
כִּי גָּנְבוּ מֵעֵדֶן לְעֻשָּׁק
חַיִּים – וְאֵין אִישׁ חַי לֹא יַחֲשֹׁק!

Spurn those who chide you for loving, who counsel you to their own advantage; and heed my words of truth: there is no life but in the company of beauty's daughters, who stole out of Eden to torture the living, and there is no man living who is not full of desire.

נְסֹךְ לְבָבְךָ בִּשְׂמָחוֹת, וְשִׂישׂ,
וּשְׁתֵה עֲלֵי יֵבֶל גֵּבֶל עֲסִיס־
יַיִן, לְקוֹל גֵּבֶל עִם תּוֹר וְסִיס,
וּרְקֹד וְגִיל, גַּם בְּךָ עַל בַּף סְפֹק,
וּשְׂבָר, תֵּלַת יַצְלַת חֵן דְּפֹק.

Plunge your heart into pleasures, make merry, drink out of wine-skins by the riverside to the sound of lyres, doves, and swifts; dance and rejoice, clap your hands, get drunk, and knock on the door of the lovely girl!

כַּאֲשֶׁר לִבָּבִי כִּצִּינָיו נִפְקַד,
גַּם עַל פִּשְׁעֵי בְּיָדוֹ נִשְׁקַד –
דָּרַשׁ תְּנוּאוֹת וְאָפוּ פָקַד,
צָעַק בְּאַף: 'רַב לְךָ, עָזְבֵנִי,
אַל תַּהְדְּפֵנִי וְאַל תַּתְעֵנִי!'

But once his eyes had done away with my heart, his hand fastened the yoke of my sin, and he looked for grievances against me. He raged and shouted in fury: 'Enough! Leave me alone! Do not drive me to crime, do not lead me astray!'

אַל תֶּאֱנַף בִּי, צְבִי, עַד כַּלָּה.
הַפְלֵא רְצוֹנְךָ, יְדִידִי, הַפְלֵא,
וּנְשַׁק יְדִידְךָ וְחֶפְצוֹ מַלֵּא.
אִם יֵשׁ בִּנְפְשְׁךָ חַיּוֹת – חַיֵּנִי,
אוֹ חֶפְצְךָ לַהֲרֹג – הָרְגֵנִי!

Oh, do not be unrelenting in your anger, fawn. Show me the wonders of your love, my friend; kiss your friend and fulfil his desire. If you wish to let me live – give me life; but if you would kill – then kill me!

וַתַּפּוּחַ THE APPLE

וַתַּפּוּחַ, אֱמֶת, אֵל לֹא בְרָאוֹ
לְבַד עֹנֶג לְמֵרִיחַ וְנוֹשֵׁק:
חֲשָׁבְתִּיהוּ – בְּשׂוּר יָרֹק וְאָדֹם
קִבּוּצִים בּוֹ – פְּנֵי חָשׁוּק וְחוֹשֵׁק.

Truly, God created the apple only to delight those who smell and fondle it. Seeing how green and red are joined in it, I imagine it to be the faces of the wan lover and the blushing beloved.

חוֹלַת אַהֲבִים RIDDLE

חוֹלַת אַהֲבִים לַיְלָה בָּכָה
תִּבְכֶּה, וְדִמְעָתָהּ עָלַי לְחָיָהּ.
תִּשְׂחַק פְּנֵי הַיּוֹשְׁבִים לָרֹנֶן
אוֹתָם – וְאֵשׁ יֹאכַל שְׂאֵר גְּוָיָהּ.
תִּתְחַל, וְאִם יָגֹז אֱנוֹשׁ רֹאשָׁהּ,
תָּעִיד – הֲכִי מֵהֲחָלִי חָיָה!

Love-sick, she weeps bitterly in the night, tears running down her cheeks. She laughs before the company to make them merry, while fire eats away her flesh. Then she looks ill; but should a man shave her head, she would clearly show that he has cured her of her illness.

יִזְכֹּר גֶּבֶר THE JOURNEY

יִזְכֹּר גֶּבֶר בִּימֵי חַיָּיו
כִּי לָמָוֶת הוּא לָקוּחַ.
וּלְאַט יִסַּע כָּל יוֹם מַסָּע,
אֶכֶן יַחְשֹׁב כִּי יָנוּחַ:
דּוֹמֶה אֶל אִישׁ שׁוֹקֵט עַל צִי –
אַךְ יֵרֵא עַל בַּנְפֵי רוּחַ.

Let man remember all the days of his life that he is being led to death. Stealthily he journeys on, day after day; he thinks he is at rest, like a man who is motionless on board ship, while the ship is flying on the wings of the wind.

פְּנֵי הָאֵל לְבַד THE TWO SONS

פְּנֵי הָאֵל לְבַד תָּמִיד אֲחַלֶּה,
וְסוֹד לִבִּי לְאָדָם לֹא אֲגַלֶּה.
וּמַה בֶּצַע בְּיַד גֶּבֶר לְגֶבֶר?
וּמַה הוֹעִיל בְּשִׂפְתֵי רָשׁ לְנִקְלֶה?
מְאַס תֵּבֵל, אֲשֶׁר תַּשְׁפִּיל גְּאוֹנָהּ
בְּיָדֶיהָ, וְקִנְיָנָהּ תְּבַלֶּה,
וּבָנִים יָלְדָה הֵמָּה שְׁנַיִם:
בִּבְטְנָהּ – מֵת, וְעַל גַּבָּהּ – מְחֻלֶּה.

I shall always seek God's favour, His alone; I shall never reveal the secret of my heart to any mortal. Can any man help his fellow-man? What use are the words of a wretch to a pauper? Scorn the World, who with her hands debases her own glory and wears out her treasures. She has given birth to two sons: the one in her belly is dead, and the one on her back is dying.

הֶקִיצוּנִי שְׂעָפַי IN THE GRAVEYARD

הֶקִיצוּנִי שְׂעָפַי לַעֲבֹר עַל
מְלוֹן הוֹרַי וְכָל אַנְשֵׁי שְׁלוֹמִי.
שְׁאִלְתִּימוֹ – וְאֵין מַקְשִׁיב וּמֵשִׁיב –
הֲבָגְדוּ בִי עֲדֵי אָבִי וְאִמִּי?
בְּלִי לָשׁוֹן קָרְאוּנִי אֲלֵיהֶם
וְהֶרְאוּנִי לְצַדֵּיהֶם מְקוֹמִי.

My thoughts roused me to stop by the resting-place of my parents and my friends. I asked them, though none could listen or reply: have you all betrayed me, even my father and my mother? Mouthlessly they summoned me to them, and showed me my place at their side.

יַעֲלַת־חֵן, רַחֲמִי לִבָּב — THE SENSITIVE DOE

יַעֲלַת חֵן, רַחֲמִי לִבָּב שָׁכְנָתִיו מֵעוֹדֵךְ.
תֵּדְעִי כִּי יוֹם תָּנוּדִי — אָסוֹנִי בְּנִדּוּדֵךְ.
גַּם בְּעֵת יֶהֱרְסוּ עֵינַי לְהַבִּיט אֶל הוֹדֵךְ,
מִלְּחָיַיִךְ פָּגְעוּ בִי נְחָשִׁים יַפְרִישׁוּ,
כִּי חֲמָתָם כָּאֵשׁ יַחְתּוּ, וְאוֹתִי יְגָרְשׁוּ.

O graceful doe, pity this heart in which you have dwelled all your life. Know that the day you leave me, your going will be my ruin. And even now, when my eyes dare to glance at your splendour, I am stung by the serpents that guard your cheeks, for their poison burns like fire and they drive me out.

שָׁלְלָה לִבִּי בַּדַּדִּים עָלַי לֵב מָגָחִים:
לֵב כְּמוֹ אֶבֶן וְרַק יְגֻמַּל שְׁנֵי תַפּוּחִים!
נִצָּבוּ וַיְהִי לִשְׂמֹאל וְיָמִין כִּרְמָחִים.
מוֹקְדֵיהֶם הֵם בְּלִבָּבִי — וְהֵם לֹא נִגְּשׁוּ,
גַּם בְּפִיהֶם דָּמִי שָׁתוּ — וְלֹא הִתְבּוֹשָׁשׁוּ!

She ensnared my heart with the breasts that lie upon her heart – a heart of stone, and yet it put forth two apples! They stand guard, to the left and to the right, like lances. Their fiery [nipples burn] in my heart, though they have never come near me. Their mouths have drunk my blood, they felt no shame at all!

יַעֲלָה חֻקֵּי דָת הָאֵל בְּעֵינֶיהָ חָפֵר,
כִּי תְמִיתֵנִי בְצִדָּיָה אָבָל אֵין לִי כֹּפֵר.
הַרְאִיתֶם עוֹד לֵב אַרְיֵה וַעֲפַעֲפֵי עֹפֶר?
לָמְדוּ לִטְרֹף בַּלָּבִיא, וְחִצִּים יְלַטֵּשׁוּ,
דַּם לְבָבִי יִמְצוּ יִשְׁתּוּ, וְנַפְשִׁי יְבַקֵּשׁוּ.

This doe violates the laws of God with her eyes: she kills me with malice aforethought, yet no one avenges me. Have you ever seen the heart of a lion joined to the eyelids of a gazelle? Her eyelids have learned to tear like a lion, they hurl sharpened arrows at me, they drain my heart's blood to the dregs. They are out for my life.

יוֹם אֲנִי מִיַּיִן דּוֹדֶיהָ כְּשִׁכּוֹר מִתְרוֹנֵן,
כִּי שְׁלוּמֶיהָ תַּפְגִּיעַ וְעָלַי תִּתְלוֹנֵן
עַל יְדֵי צִירִים; וּכְבוֹאָם, אֲלֵיהֶם תִּתְחַנֵּן:
'מַלְאֲכֵי שָׁלוֹם, פְּגוּעוּ בִי, שְׁנוּ גַּם שַׁלֵּשׁוּ!'
מַאֲמָרָם לִבִּי פִתּוּ וְרוּחִי חִדְּשׁוּ.

One day, when I was reeling like a drunkard, longing for the wine of her love, she dispatched envoys to me bearing greetings and complaints; and when they returned to her, she begged them: 'O messengers of peace, come again and yet again!' These tidings seduced my heart and revived my spirit.

יוֹם בְּגַנָּהּ רָעוּ יָדַי וְדָדֶיהָ עִשְּׁוּ,
אָמְרָה: 'הֶרֶף יָדַיִךְ — הֲכִי עוֹד לֹא נָסוּ!'
וַאֲמָרִים לִי הֶחְלִיקָה לְבָבִי הֵמַסּוּ:
'גַּן מִתָּא נְקִשׁ, יָא חֲבִיבִי, פַּאנְכַּר דְּנָאשׁוּ
אֶלְגְּלָאלָה רְכִיצָה בְּשִׁתָּאת הַפַּרְמְשׁוּ.'

But one day when my hands were grazing in her garden and fondling her breasts, she said: 'Now take away your hands – they are not skilful enough.'[1] And her words were so seductive that they melted my heart: 'Do not touch me, friend, I do not like those who hurt me. My breasts are soft and sensitive. Enough! I shall refuse one and all!'[2]

עָפְרָה חֲכַבֵּס — THE LAUNDRESS

עָפְרָה חֲכַבֵּס אֶת בְּגָדֶיהָ בְּמֵי
דִמְעִי וְתִשְׁטָחֵם לְשֶׁמֶשׁ זִהֲרָהּ:
לֹא שָׁאֲלָה מֵי הָעֲיָנוֹת — עִם שְׁתֵּי
עֵינַי, וְלֹא שֶׁמֶשׁ — לְיֶפִי תָּאָרָהּ.

My love washes her clothes in the water of my tears and spreads them out in the sun of her beauty. She has no need of spring-water – she has my two eyes; nor of the sun – she has her own radiance.

מַה לָּךְ, צְבִיָּה — SONG OF FAREWELL

מַה לָּךְ, צְבִיָּה, תִּמְנְעִי צִירַיִךְ
מִדּוֹד, צְלָעָיו מָלְאוּ צִירַיִךְ?
לֹא תֵדְעִי. כִּי אֵין לְדוֹדֵךְ מְזַמָּן
בְּלִתְּי שְׁמֹעַ קוֹל שְׁלוֹמוֹתַיִךְ?
אִם הֻפְרַדְתָּ עַל שְׁנֵינוּ נְגָזָרָה —
עִמְדִי מְעַט עַד אֶחֱזֶה פָּנַיִךְ.
לֹא אֵדָעָה אִם בֵּין צַלְעַי נֶעֱצַר
לִבִּי, וְאִם יֵלֶךְ לְמַסָּעַיִךְ.

Why, O fair one, do you withhold your envoys from the lover whose heart is filled with pain of you? Do you not know that Time means nothing to your beloved, unless he hear your welcoming voice? If we two are doomed to parting, stay a while and let me look at your face. I do not know if my heart has come to a stop between my ribs, or else has wandered off with you. Oh,

1. Or, 'they [my breasts] have not yet experienced such things'.
2. The last two lines are in mixed Arabic and Romance. The meaning is uncertain.

חַי אַהֲבָה, זְכְרִי יְמֵי חִשֻּׁקֵךְ כְּמוֹ
אֶזְכֹּר אֲנִי לֵילוֹת תְּשׁוּקוֹתַיִךְ.
בַּאֲשֶׁר דְּמוּתֵךְ בַּחֲלוֹמִי יַעֲבֹר,
כֵּן אֶעְבְּרָה־נָּא בַחֲלוֹמוֹתַיִךְ.
בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵךְ יָם דְּמָעוֹת יֵהֱמוּ
גַּלָּיו, וְלֹא אוּכַל עֲבֹר אֵלַיִךְ.
אַךְ לוּ פְעָמַיִךְ לָעָבְרוֹ קָרְבוּ,
אָז נִבְקְעוּ מֵימָיו לְכַף רַגְלַיִךְ.
לוּ אַחֲרֵי מוֹתִי בְּאָזְנֵי יַעֲלֶה
קוֹל פַּעֲמוֹן זָהָב עֲלֵי שׁוּלַיִךְ!
אוֹ תִשְׁאֲלִי לְשָׁלוֹם יְדִידֵךְ, מִשְׁאוֹל
אֶשְׁאַל בְּדוֹדַיִךְ וּבְשָׁלוֹמַיִךְ! [...]

for the life of love, remember the days of your desire, as I remember the nights of your passion. And just as your image moves through my dreams, let mine move through yours. A sea of tears roars between us, and I cannot cross its waves to reach you. But if your steps approached to cross them, the waters would divide before your feet. Oh, after my death, let me still hear the sound of the golden bells on the hem of your skirt. And if you then ask how your beloved is, I, from the grave, will send you my love and my blessings!

מִי יִתְּנֵנִי אֶחְיֶה עַד אֶאֱרֶה
בְּשֶׂם וּמֹר מִבֵּין הֲלִיכוֹתַיִךְ.
לֹא אֶשְׁמְעָה קוֹלֵךְ, אֲבָל אֶשְׁמַע עֲלֵי
סִתְרֵי לִבִּי קוֹל צְעָדוֹתַיִךְ. [...]

If only I could live until I gather myrrh and spices from among your footprints! I cannot hear your voice, but in the covert of my heart I hear the sound of your steps.

בִּי הַצָּבִי, בִּי אֲדוֹנִי — THE CRUEL LOVER

בִּי הַצָּבִי, בִּי אֲדוֹנִי,
יִקַּר בְּעֵינֵךְ יְגוֹנִי,
פֶּן יִקְרֵנִי אָסוֹנִי.
אַט, אַט, אַט בְּדָמִי,
בִּי רַק בְּיָדֵךְ שְׁלוֹמִי!

O my fair youth, my lord, take my grief to heart, lest disaster overtake me. Oh, gently, deal gently with my blood, for my fate is in your hands alone.

יְרַךְ לְבָבְךָ לִנְדֻבָּה
יָצוּם לְזַעְמְךָ וְיִבְכֶּה
וּלְמָן רְצוֹנְךָ יְחַכֶּה.
מָן, מָן מָן לְצוֹמִי,
וּתְנָה שְׂכָרִי בְּיוֹמִי.

Pity the forlorn one, fasting and weeping because of your anger, waiting for the manna of your favour. Oh, give me manna, manna for my hunger and pay me my wages every day.

אִם תַּעֲלֹז עַל חֳלָיַי —
אֶשְׁטַח לְךָ אֶת לְחָיַי,
וַתַּעֲנֵנִי: 'חַיַּי!
אֵין, אֵין, אֵין בְּחֶרְמִי
רַק הַהֲרוּגִים לְחֶמְדִּי'.

When you laugh at my suffering, I show you my tear-stained cheeks. But you answer: 'Truly, there are none in my trap, none but those whom I captured unwittingly.'

אָרִיב בְּנַפְשִׁי לְכֵילִי:
לוּ יְפַחֲדֵנִי וְאֵלַי
יָשִׁיב שְׁנָתִי, וְאוּלַי
עָף, עָף, עָף בְּנוּמִי,
יָבוֹא בְּכֶפֶל חֲלוֹמִי!

I reproach myself because of this miserly youth: if he were to fear me, he might give me back my slumber; he might fly, Oh fly to me in my sleep, and be caught in the mesh of my dreams.

אִם אֶשְׁאֲלָה צוּף שְׂפָתוֹ,
יַאְדִּים כְּשֶׁמֶשׁ בְּצֵאתוֹ —
עַד אֶחֱזֶה מְדֻמּוּתוֹ
אֵיךְ, אֵיךְ, אֵיךְ אֲרַמִּי
יַהְפֹּךְ דְּמוּתוֹ אֲדוֹמִי!

When I ask for the nectar of his lips, he blushes like the rising sun, until I see in his face how, Oh how the Aramean turns into an Edomite![1]

שִׁירוֹ יְפַלַּח כְּבֵדִי.
יָשִׁיר לְעוֹרֵר יְקוֹדִי:
'שֵׁק פִּי וְרַב לָךְ, יְדִידִי,
בס, בס, בס בפמי
ודע סואדך, יא עמי!'

His song pierces my heart. He sings to fan my flames: 'Kiss my mouth, and no more, my friend. Kiss me on the mouth, kiss me, and forget your melancholy, love.'[2]

1. A play on words: i.e. how Laban (*lavan*, 'white') the Aramean turns into an Edomite (*adom*, 'red').
2. The last couplet is in Arabic.