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PREFACE

Our knowledge of Yehuda Halevi's life is not restricted to what has emerged from his own poems – whose trustworthiness has been undermined by medieval and classical notions of poetry – for there are also external sources, such as letters written in both Hebrew and Arabic, documents and an assortment of anecdotes. Halevi, as is well known, was also acclaimed as the author of a highly influential and widely read philosophical treatise aimed at defending the despised and humiliated Jewish religion by means of a dialogue in which the poet – or his literary double – engages with a pagan king seeking the true faith. The treatise culminates in the recognition that the Jew has no true place on earth other than *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel. This assumption was given further credence by a sixteenth-century account of Halevi's death in which the poet reaches the Land of Israel at the end of his days, but is trampled to death at the gates of Jerusalem by an Arab horseman resentful of the poet's faith. Halevi's celebrated sea poems have undoubtedly also contributed to his image as a holy pilgrim seeking to redeem his soul in the Land of Israel. Hayyim Schirmann, the preeminent scholar of medieval poetry, undertook to uncover, with the thoroughness of an archeologist, the hidden recesses of Halevi's biographical poems – but he was to be pleasantly surprised some time after he had completed his task.

The most reliable source dealing with the poet's daring voyage to the Holy Land was disclosed in a series of authenticated letters written by Halevi and a circle of his friends who had been involved in this last chapter of his life. The letters were discovered in the largest trove of surviving Jewish medieval manuscripts – the Cairo

Genizah. The Genizah contains scraps of letters and documents written over nine hundred years ago and intended to be read by friends and business partners engaged in maritime commerce in the Mediterranean basin, including autograph letters by none other than Yehuda Halevi himself. The writing – frequently penned in the somewhat messy style of personal memos, as well as in the Arabic dialect of the Middle Ages employed by Jews living in Muslim countries – is extremely difficult to decipher. The noted Genizah scholar, S.D. Goitein, toiled over and edited the material over many years during the second half of the twentieth century. Most of the documents on which he based his conclusions appeared in his first publications. But Goitein died in 1985 – close to a century after the Cairo Genizah first came to public attention – without being able to see through to publication his magisterial tome in which he had compiled and arranged the merchants’ letters according to their personal archives.

The fourth chapter in Goitein’s unpublished opus includes eighty documents that found their way to the Genizah from the private archives of the wealthy and learned merchant, Halfon Ben Natanael Halevi, a resident of Cairo, who had acted in his journeys as a bridge between the east and the west. He was in fact Yehuda Halevi’s link to the Land of Israel, and his archives are important to us for this reason in particular. It is to be hoped that Goitein’s opus will soon be published. In the meantime fifty-five of the documents relating to the poet and his circle have been gathered in Moshe Gil and Ezra Fleischer’s book, *Yehuda Halevi and his Circle*, while a considerable amount of literary material is still buried in the worn and tattered diwans – as the various inclusive collections of Halevi’s poems were called – preserved in the Hebrew collection of the public library in St. Petersburg. Considering that the edition brought out by Hayyim Brody was published over one hundred years ago, a new scientific edition of Halevi’s poetry, which would draw on all the sources available today, is long overdue. The foundations of such an

edition already exist in theory based on earlier editions and on the information accumulated in the Arabic superscriptions to the poetry as they appear in their various versions. All references to Halevi's poems in this book relate to the forthcoming edition: *The Diwan of Yehuda Halevi: (Hiyya Diwan)* (Neubauer, MS 1970).

The story of piecing together the poet's diwan is fascinating in itself as it concerns, among others, champions of Halevi's poetry who were involved in the last episode in the poet's life when he sojourned in Egypt. A long list of people belonging to the cultural and artistic elite contributed, each in his own way, to the gathering of the poems. There existed, moreover, to a greater or lesser degree, a hidden rivalry and even a slight censoring of poems innocently composed by Halevi in honor of various leaders of Palestinian Jewry in Egypt. For in the end this leadership was a disgrace in the eyes of the descendents of Maimonides who fought to the bitter end against the remnants of the Jewish community and its leaders, and this undoubtedly left its mark in the reception of the poems Halevi dedicated to prominent members of the Jewish leadership with whom, perhaps not incidentally, he sympathized.

The monograph before us interweaves biographical material with literary details that are not known from any other sources other than the diwan itself. Such an integration of material is especially pertinent when speaking of a figure like Yehuda Halevi, since the extent of our knowledge concerning the poet's life far exceeds any other Hebrew poet of the Middle Ages. The poems and the historical evidence are threaded into a narrative that begins in the poet's youth and ends with his mysterious death. The early chapters of the book recount the fate of one poem, "Zion, will you not ask," over several generations, and follows the paths of its reception, while the last chapters are concerned with the redactors and their editing of the diwans. The body of the work attempts to describe the man within the context of the three major stages in his life's ongoing pilgrimage: in

Christian Spain, in Andalusia (Muslim Spain) and during his travels to the Land of Israel.

A somewhat lengthy story and many individuals are in the background of my work on Halevi's poetry. I wrote my first scholarly work in the Hebrew University in the summer of 1961, under the guidance of the late Professor J. Schirmann, on R. Judah Halevi's immigration to the Land of Israel, based on the Genizah documents. I learned of the Genizah fragments of the poems during the course of my work in the Geniza Research Institute for Hebrew Poetry of the Israel National Academy of Science, as the research assistant of the late professor E. Fleischer, immediately upon the establishment of the Institute.

I was assisted in the reading and deciphering of the headlines to the poems, that were written in Judeo-Arabic, by Professor J. Blau, the leading expert on this language. I worked with Professor I. Benabu on the Romance concluding lines of Halevi's girdle poems, and our work led to several joint publications. My colleagues were very helpful, and were quite willing to answer my questions and direct me to sources that I would not have found on my own. Especially noteworthy among them are Profs. M. Idel and Z. Harvey from Jerusalem, and Profs. M. A. Fridman, U. Shavit, and M. Schwarz from Tel Aviv. The book was carefully translated by Gabriel Levin, for which I am grateful. Important changes were suggested by Michael Novick, Avi Shmidman, and, more than all, by my students.

I was greatly aided by the students with whom I am engaged in preparing the edition of Halevi's poetry, including Ruth Blumert, Almog Behar, and Naoya Katsumata. With their help, I hope that the *diwan* of R. Judah Halevi (The Hiyya Edition) will be published shortly.

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foundations of Oded Eliaschar of Jerusalem and of Ms. Aliza Nivi, whose late husband Shlomo was one of David Yellin's first students at the Hebrew University, in its original Mount Scopus campus, and who wrote, under his guidance, a scholarly work on R. Judah Halevi and his poems of Zion. Ms. Nivi supported the publication of this volume, the twin brother of the Hebrew, Shirat Hayyav.

My approach to R. Judah Halevi's poetry and life was undoubtedly influenced by my and my teachers' Land of Israel background, and possibly also by the book's publication in Jerusalem, by the Magnes Press, that is named after the first president of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who also made the lengthy journey from the ends of the West of his time to Jerusalem. I accept full responsibility for this approach, while offering my heartfelt thanks to all those who aided me on my own long journey.

Kyoto, 2008
Joseph Yahalom