

THE PROVINCIAL VOICE OF PROVENÇAL POETRY

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In the 13th century, after almost three centuries of secular Hebrew poetry written, first in Al-Anadalus and then in Christian Spain, we hear for the first time similar voices from Provence. As usually described, the poetry of Provence continues the Spanish one, and, as such, belongs to the same literary school. This reading considers both poetries as Andalusian traditions cultivated in a Christian environment. Justified as it may be, this kind of reading might mislead the reader, and prevent him from observing the local and provincial nature of Provençal poetry. Though in the 12th and 13th centuries the contacts between north Spain and Provence were constantly tightened, the Pyrenees that stood there long before should not be underestimated:

Unlike their counterpart Jewry in north Spain, which had the Andalusian culture built into their identity, the Jews of Provence were just getting to know it, and even that was through Hebrew mediations. Secular poetry written in Provence was indeed first motivated by encountering the Spanish one, but as such it couldn't last for long. Provençal poetry had to develop a local voice, differ itself, first and foremost in terms of geography.

As it will be offered here, Secular Hebrew poetry written in 13th century Provence, should be read as a frontier art and through the tools of "Deterritorialised literature" it could be better understood. "Deterritorialised literature" is the term used by Deleuze and Guattari to indicate the situation of one literature (in this case, Provençal) within another, more dominant literary tradition (in this case, the Andalusian tradition imported into Provence by the Al-Muwahidun refugees). The minor literature is not written in a minor language, but in the major one. However, it aspires to assert its identity, using the language with a strong coefficient of deterritorialisation, which incorporates linguistic features reflecting its deterritorialised position.

Reading the Provençal poetry as offered here, will attempt at exposing the signs for its deterritorialised position: written in the major language forms of the classical Andalusian poetry, Provençal poetry was created in an alien- non Spanish- environment storing other memories than Andalusian poetry, memories that find their way into the literature, shaping the local identity.