

TE'UDA

XXIX

YAD MOSHE

Studies in the History of the Jews in Muslim Countries
in Memory of Moshe Gil

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Studies in the History of the Jews in Muslim Countries
in Memory of Moshe Gil

Editors

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ABSTRACTS

Part One: Jewish Leadership and Community Life

The Exilarch's Dams

Michael Lecker

Qanāṭir Rās al-Jālūt, or the Exilarch's dams, are mentioned once in the famous History of Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE). The dams were located at the northern environs of Kūfa, or perhaps some distance north of Kūfa, up the western branch of the Euphrates. The account in Ṭabarī's History concerns an event that took place several decades after the Muslim conquest, but the construction of the dams must have preceded it. Dams in Iraq were often the starting points (or "mouths") of irrigation canals.

As is well known, the Exilarch had a great deal of landed property. One assumes that he owned the dams that carried his name (as well as the relevant irrigation canals and the fields along them). Other dams in the early Islamic period were called after Muslim notables, probably because they belonged to them.

A New Reading in Old Documents: On Two Matters of Jewish Leadership in Palestine and Egypt under Fātimid Rule

Elianoar Bareket

A fresh reading in old documents proves once again that when more eyes view the same documents new insights emerge as to their content. The first issue concerns the controversial question of whether the position of the Head of Jews in Fātimid Egypt already existed during the 11th century. A small note in the Genizah document comes to show that the chance of such a notion is substantial. The second issue concerns the relationship between the Gaon of Babylonia and the Gaon of Palestine, and explores the question whether the harsh relations between the two were not only the

result of political power struggles but also reflect deeper undercurrents of acrimonious personal and family relations.

The Jewish Community of Fez in Pre-Muwahid Times (8th-12th centuries) – A Preliminary Sketch

Miriam Frenkel

The article is an initial outline of the early history of the Jewish community of medieval Fez, Morocco (Arabic: Fas). Jews constituted a significant part of the city from the time of its foundation by the Idrisi dynasty in the 8th century. With the gradual Islamization of the city during 9th-10th centuries, Jews became a target for persecution and harassment. During the first decades of the 11th century, the Jewish population increased, mainly due to intensive migration from Spain and from the eastern parts of the Islamic Caliphate. The community of Fas was deeply integrated into the dense network of Jewish communities in the Islamic world. It was closely affiliated with the communities of Andalus, held reciprocal spiritual connections with the Palestinian center, and obeyed the halakhic authority of Babylonian Geonim. At the same time it also developed a unique local school in the fields of Hebrew poetry and linguistics. The Jewish traders of Fas were united in a separate business cooperation renowned for its outstanding credibility. They traded in unique commodities and operated along trade routes, which differed from those taken by other Mediterranean firms. With the forced conversion imposed by the Almohads on all non-Muslims, the local Jewish community actually disappeared for the next hundred years.

'A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment' – Dress and Gender in the Cairo Genizah Documents

Ora Molad-Vaza

The distinction between men's and women's attire is found in the scriptural commandment: 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God' (Deuteronomy 22:5). This commandment is mentioned in a discussion in the Babylonian Talmud, in which sages debate its meaning (B.T. Nazir 59a). This paper examines

whether Jewish men and women living in Islamic lands in the Middle Ages dressed differently from each other, and whether they strictly observed separate dress, according to gender. The paper focuses on the diversity of interpretations that the sages of the period offered regarding this scriptural commandment, along with evidence from the Genizah regarding male and female attire and customs of dress.

An examination of the various interpretations reveals that the sages understood the phrase 'that which pertaineth to a man', to refer to weapons. Some of them forbade women to wear items of dress such as a special waistband, the *'imāma* turban and some undergarments, which were all used by soldiers and senior army officers and were considered typical male garments in Muslim society. The Halakhic *midrash* also adds that women are forbidden to wear white clothing and men may not wear colorful clothing. Regarding the 'woman's dress, which is forbidden to men, the same sages explain that the term refers to jewelry or colorful clothing. Some of them note a number of garments that women wore, including facial veils and head coverings and robes, and they permit men to wear them on condition that they wear them in a different manner than is habitual for women. Maimonides also advises to consult local customs in answering questions regarding permitted or forbidden dress for both genders.

As to how people actually conducted themselves, Genizah sources suggests that the use of certain kinds of head dresses and trousers, both of which apparently belonged to the male wardrobe, were the type of cloths that distinguished men's garb from women's garb. Besides, typical women's garments were a variety of veils that women used to wear, probably for modesty reason, and many kinds of jewelry. It also appears that people did not strictly observe the prohibitions set by the sages. For example, women wore colorful clothing, including white. Men also wore both brightly colored and white clothing and jewelry. The Genizah mentions additional apparel used by men and women, and attests that both spouses could wear the same garment, apparently for economic reasons. These practices were also typical of Muslim society, contrary to the religious laws of Islam, and so may have affected Jewish society as well. It is probable that this day-to-day reality caused the Jewish sages to accept that local custom must be taken into consideration in interpreting the scriptural law and in dealing with questions regarding men's and women's attire.

Part Two: The World of the Yeshivot

Hayya Rosh ha-Yeshivah and the Karaites

David Sklare

The early 10th-century Karaite Ya‘qūb al-Qirqisānī informs us that Hayya Rosh ha-Yeshivah wrote a work in which he polemicized against the Karaites about the calendar. Later in the tenth century, Yefet ben ‘Eli included a lengthy Hebrew citation from Hayya’s book in a number of his works. Hayya Rosh ha-Yeshivah has been identified as either Hayya ben David or Hayya ben Naḥshon, who served as heads of the yeshivot of Pumbedita and Sura at the end of the 9th century. Babylonian Gaonic literature, however, has not preserved any indication that either of them ever wrote such a work. Nor does it seem that Rabbanite authorities in the 10th century such as Samuel ben Ḥofnī knew of the book. It is therefore suggested that Hayya Rosh ha-Yeshiva was active in Eretz Israel in the ninth century in a place (possibly Tiberius) where some people thought that a rapprochement between the Rabbanites and Karaites was possible, as suggested by the tenor of Hayya’s text. This possibility is supported by an anonymous apologetic for Rabbinic tradition, apparently written in the 9th century in Eretz Israel, which indicates that some people had hopes for such a rapprochement. This may have been during the period that Zemaḥ b. Josiah, a descendent of ‘Anan b. David, was head of the yeshivah in Eretz Israel.

Judaeo-Arabic Judicial Works: A Source of Historical Knowledge

Y. Zvi Stampfer

The article discusses various historical findings from the Judaeo-Arabic judicial work of Hayya Gaon (939 – 1038), who served as the head of Pumpedita academy in Bagdad. I juxtapose these findings with the relevant historical information discussed by Prof. Moshe Gill.

The documental sources show that Jews were not immune to various disasters that struck Baghdad during the 10th and 11th centuries: in times of trouble, the masses vented their frustration on the groups protected by the government, among them the Jews. Political instability only exacerbated the problem, and Muslim historians speak of repeated assaults by Muslims on their Jewish neighbors. Nevertheless, consulting Jewish judicial work

can help us reconstruct a more balanced picture. Referring to a Talmudic discussion that speaks of the protection that the Persian Jews received in Sasanid times, Rav Hayya wrote: "These Muslims are even more anxious for our safety and are protecting us." This text was intended for internal Jewish use in the context of Jewish law, and there is no reason to think that it was written under external pressure or censorship. It can therefore be regarded as an authentic statement of Hayya Gaon's opinion. Another issue is the taxation system of lands. The extant sources state that the Muslim government in Baghdad allowed the farmers to choose between paying in proportion to the size of their land or by percentage of the harvest. Nevertheless, we find that Hayya Gaon adds a personal remark in one of his judicial works, stating that farmers often try to get rid of their land but cannot find anyone who is willing to buy it, even for nothing, due to the heavy taxation. This finding is evidence that during this period, the land tax was not in proportion to the harvest, but rather, fixed, and extremely high.

Part Three: Biblical Exegesis

Aspects of Abraham Maimuni's Attitude towards Christians in his Commentary on Genesis 36

Naḥem Ilan

Rabbi Avraham Maimuni (1186-1237) was a leader of the Jewish community in Egypt in the first third of the 13th century, following the death of his father, Maimonides (1204) until his own death. He was active in the fields of medicine, biblical commentary (Genesis and Exodus), adjudication of Jewish law and philosophy, and he openly identified with the Sufi movement. His interpretation of Genesis 36 stands out in its length and abundance of discussions, despite the fact that the subject matter of the chapter (genealogical list of Esau and his descendants) is quite marginal in Jewish exegetical tradition. Among other topics, his commentary relates explicitly to the Crusaders, a finding that is not surprising considering that in his time the Crusaders reached the outskirts of Cairo. Most of the commentary is focused on the plain meaning of the text, but it also contains homiletic sections, in which can be found reverberations of the hardships of his time and location, as well as overt but mainly covert polemics against Christianity. Maimuni

wrestled with the religious and political significance of the Crusades for the Jewish community in Egypt, and his work held meaning for Jews in the entire Mediterranean basin, since it reached beyond Egypt to *Eretz Israel* as well. He worked hard to encourage his congregation who felt especially humiliated and threatened during this troublesome period.

“Scribe”, “Redactor” and “Author” – the Multifaceted Concept of the Biblical Narrator (*mudawwin*) in Medieval Karaite Exegesis

Meira Polliack

The medieval Karaite exegetes created a radical change in Jewish thought, in two main areas: firstly, they redefined the role of the Hebrew Bible as one of overriding importance, vis à vis, the Mishnah and Talmud, in Jewish religious life and literature. Secondly, they based their act of re-reading the Bible on the rise of literacy typical of their era, placing the Written Torah (the Bible) in opposition to the Oral Torah (Rabbinic lore), as God's sole authentic revelation to the Jews, whose status is equivalent to that of the Quran among the Muslims. A key concept that enabled them to develop their understanding of the Hebrew Bible and to theorize about its composition was that of the biblical *mudawwin*. Though clearly a literary-formalist construct, more than a historical-critical one, the Karaites applied it to Scripture in a multifaceted sense. Hence, the *mudawwin* concept does not strictly parallel the “narrator” construct in modern literary theory. Rather, it designates the person/s who played a role over time in fashioning the final form of the biblical text, and who were responsible for its literary texture. At times, they were writing it down technically, as a scribe would; at others they were editing it, as would an anthologist or redactor; and often they were fashioning its literary devices and creating its effects, as would a narrator or an authorial-narrator in the modern literary sense. These roles may submerge into one or become more distinctive, depending on the biblical text undergoing exegesis. The paper reviews these different functions of the Karaite *mudawwin*, in the abstract sense, as a widely applicable and flexible concept, which generally bespeaks of anonymous figures, unidentified with specified historical biblical characters. Rather these figures appear to lie behind the *writing process* of the biblical text, and so may explain its *complexity* as a text.

Yefet ben 'Eli's Introduction to his Translation and Commentary on Proverbs

Ilana Sasson

Yefet's introduction to his translation and commentary on Proverbs, which generally conforms to the Arabic model of an author's introduction (*muqaddima*) to a literary, exegetical or philosophical work is divided into two parts. The first is a general preface to the entire commentary: it opens with invocations that echo mu'tazilite doctrine and include a reference to God as the one who bestows wisdom upon mankind. Therein follows a discussion of rational and revealed knowledge, and the importance of the book of Proverbs for deriving halakhah. It ends with a blessing and a wish for God's favor. The second part is comprised of Yefet's comments on the first seven verses of Proverbs 1, which he considers to consist of the biblical author-redactor's (the *mudawwin*'s) introduction to Proverbs. In this part, Yefet presents a systematic analysis of the content of the book, its division into segments according to incipits, and the categorization of its content according to terms found in the first seven verses.

Daniel al-Qūmisī's Commentary to the Story of the Tabernacle's Construction

Yoram Erder

Since many halakhic issues, such as the calendar, sacrifices, the holiness of the Shabbat, are involved in the story of the Tabernacle construction, it is not surprising that this story served as a focus of debate between the Jewish sects of the late Second Temple Period. Pluralism was clearly a hallmark of 10th and 11th century Karaite biblical exegesis, and so the Tabernacle story was treated by various of their exegetes in different ways. Only few remnants of al-Qūmisī's commentary on the Pentateuch are in our hands. The Karaite scholar Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī found it necessary to argue in detail with al-Qūmisī on the Tabernacle issues, in his commentary to the Pentateuch. Since Qirqisānī quotes al-Qūmisī's exegesis, with clear mention of his name, we are able to identify al-Qūmisī's ideas on the subjects involved also from other Karaite commentators who discuss his views without mentioning their owner. After studying al-Qūmisī's halakha on the issues discussed one comes to the conclusion that he was much more

inclined to absorb sectarian halakha from the second Temple period than his successors Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī and Yefet ben 'Eli.

Part Four: The Judaeo-Arabic Language

Orthography and Reading in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic

Geoffrey Khan

Judaeo-Arabic texts from the pre-modern period constitute an important source for the history of the Arabic language. The vast majority of this philological work has been based on unvocalized orthography without any access to the oral reading of the texts. In the history of Muslim Arabic it is clear from the lack of correspondence between the orthography of the Qur'ān and the oral recitation of the Qur'ān in a number of linguistic details that orthography does not necessarily reflect the way a text is read. The purpose of the present paper is to examine a number of medieval Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts in which the scribes have added Hebrew vocalization signs to reflect the way the texts were read. I investigate the background of the reading tradition reflected by the vocalization and address the following questions: (i) to what extent does the reading tradition reflect the vernacular spoken Arabic dialect of the scribe? (ii) Is this type of reading tradition of a written text unique to Judaeo-Arabic or are there parallels with non-Jewish traditions of reading Arabic? The main comparative sources that are utilized with regard to the second question include medieval Greek and Coptic transcriptions of Arabic.

The conclusion that emerges is that the vocalized Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts from the Middle Ages reflect a far more vernacular reading of a written text than is found in the reading of Classical Arabic as preserved in the canonical reading traditions of the Qur'ān. Some features of reading that deviate from Classical Arabic, however, such as the replacement of *hamzatu l-waṣl* by *hamzatu l-qaṭ'*, do not have obvious correlations with vernacular dialects. This profile of non-Classical Arabic reading is not unique to Judaeo-Arabic but has close parallels to medieval Christian traditions of reading Arabic that are reflected by Arabic texts transcribed into Greek and Coptic.

Aspects of the Comparison between Biblical Hebrew and Arabic in Abū al-Faraj Hārūn's *Tafsīr al-Alfāz*

Nasir Basal

The famous Karaite grammarian, Abu al-Faraj Hārūn, was well-versed in Arabic language and literature. He also shows a wide knowledge in classical Arabic linguistic sources. Abu al-Faraj based his biblical grammar books, known as *al-Mushtamil* and *al-Kāfi*, on classical Arabic grammatical theory, particularly from the school of the great Arab grammarian Ibn al-Sarrāj. In his other work, known as *Tafsīr al-Alfāz*, he interpreted and commented on the biblical lexicon. Most of the discussions therein are naturally semantic discussions, and rely on Jewish-Karaite sources. It is possible to prove with certainty that the main source for these lexical explicatory notes is found in Yefet ben Eli's commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, but we also sometimes find analogies with David Ben-Abraham al-Fāsī's biblical Lexicon (known as *Kitāb al-Alfāz*). Moreover, a few explanations are similar to the *'Risāla* by Yehudah Judah ben Quraysh. This paper concentrates on Abu al-Faraj's lexical notes, for which I have found no parallel in existing works. Due to the lack of existing parallels, these notes may be considered as original interpretations by Abu al-Faraj Hārūn himself, or, a derived from ancient Karaite sources, which have not come down to us.

Part Five: Jewish Thought

Pietistic Criticism: Remonstrance among Abraham Maimonides' Devotees

Mordechai Akiva Friedman

Abraham Maimonides (= AM) wrote a defense of his pietistic devotees, who were usually unjustly criticized, in his opinion. He admitted, however, that some adherents had joined his movement for ulterior motives. He cautioned followers not to believe criticism of their associates without investigating and confirming alleged wrongdoing but to admonish those who deserved reprimand.

The first of three letters written in Judeo-Arabic edited in this study (from the 1230s) is reconstructed from two pieces (Mosseri II.162.1 + TS 10 J 13.8), the bottom one previously edited by Goitein. A former social service

officer had joined the pietists in AM's meeting hall (*majlis*), where devotees engaged in Sufi-like exercises such as fasting and night vigils, but he later abandoned the group. The Jewish versus the Islamic origins of the exercises are discussed. At the behest of AM, the writer admonished the absentee for requesting financial assistance and told him to return to the *majlis*. He instructed him to earn a livelihood and support his father. Accusations of aberrant behavior may have included such excesses as celibacy or abstinence. The writer noted that Abraham Maimonides attracted devotees from distant lands. An obscure remark cites AM's intention to travel abroad and visit holy sites (in Eretz Israel).

The second letter (from the 1230s) is a brief note (TS 6 J 4.12) in which five of Abraham Maimonides' followers apologized to a leader of the pietistic movement for having written an earlier letter anonymously. They had concealed their identity out of apprehension that ostensible ascetics with ulterior motives might cause them harm.

The third item is an incomplete letter to Abraham Maimonides by the communal leader of the Egyptian town Bilbays (1218). Dr. Amir Ashur identified five fragments (TS K25.240.14, 17, 33, 38, 54) of the letter on the obverse of orders of payment AM later wrote. The writer reported that he had followed the Nagid's instructions to ignore criticism of a certain R. Barukh and to provide him with financial support.

The appendix contains an analysis of a previously unnoticed emendation in Maimonides' Commentary to Mishnah Sota 3:4 (מכות פרושים). The original Judeo-Arabic text seems to have said that hypocritical ascetics, who cause hatred of the Torah because of their unjustified stringencies, are a source of affliction to the Jewish people.

Abraham Bar Ḥiyya on 'the Pure Soul': The Neoplatonic Doctrine of the Soul in the service of an Apocalyptic Interpretation of History

Ehud Krinis

The article examines Abraham bar Ḥiyya's elaboration of the term 'the pure soul' (*ha-neshamah ha-ṭehorah*) in his treatise *Megillat ha-Megalleh* (*Scroll of the Revealer*). This serves as a test-case for a basic argument: when studying the appropriation of Neoplatonic notions by Muslim and Jewish innovative authors and circles (in al-Andalus in particular) one has to take into account

the encounter between the Hellenistic worldview and the Apocalyptic and Messianic tendencies in Muslim (especially Shī'ī) and Jewish traditions. These tendencies were essentially foreign to the Hellenistic-Neoplatonic tradition. As a result, Neoplatonism was put to work at the service of the strong Apocalyptic tendencies of some Andalusī writers, among whom Abraham bar Ḥiyya stands out as a good example.

Part Six: Liturgical Poetry

'Eli ha-Kohen ben Ezekiel's Contribution to the Field of Medieval Hebrew Poetry

Tova Beerī

'Eli ben Ezekiel (c. 1000 – c. 1075) is a well-known figure whose works are abundantly represented in the documents of the Cairo Genizah. He held a senior clerical position in the Jerusalem 'court' under two of the major leaders of his time: Salomon ben Yehuda Gaon and Daniel ben Azarya Gaon. Ben Ezekiel's love of Hebrew piyyut (liturgical poetry) and his contribution to this field is attested in the hundreds of poems he copied in his typical and easily recognizable handwriting, poems composed by numerous authors from different eras.

This paper surveys Eli ha-Kohen's works in this field by covering the various literary works he copied out, along with a list of his original poems. Three of his original poems edited from Cairo Genizah sources are also included herein.

Part Seven: Early Islam

The Promised Land and the End of Days in the Qur'ān and the Early Muslim Tradition

Uri Rubin

In Q 5: 20-26 Moses reminds the Children of Israel of the favor God bestowed upon them when he raised prophets among them and made them kings. Moses then goes on to order them to enter the sacred land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*), but they refuse for fear of its mighty inhabitants. Thereupon Moses declares

that the land shall be forbidden to them for 40 years during which they shall wander about in the land. In this passage, obviously a retelling of the biblical affair of the spies, the promised land, or Palestine, appears as a holy destination in which prophets and kings acted among the Israelites. Moses' command to enter it carries an implicit message to Muḥammad's cotemporary audience—be they Jews, Christians or pagans—to enter the land which was forbidden to the disobedient Israelites. The reference to the prophets and kings implies the messianic aspect of the instruction to enter the land, namely to revive the glorious past of the prophets and kings.

The fact that the disobedient Israelites (known in Jewish sources as “the Generation of the Wilderness”) were prevented from entering the land for a fixed period (40 years) leaves them the option to enter it at a certain point in the future. This is indeed the context of Q 17:104 which predicts the coming forth of troops of Banū Isrā'īl at the end of days (*wa'd alākhirā*). This passage can be illuminated through Jewish messianic texts (especially the Book of Zerubbabel), foretelling the return of the Dead of the Wilderness as warriors with the Messiah son of David. Once again, the message conveyed in this passage to Muḥammad's listeners is that they are expected to become the community destined to carry out the messianic mission prescribed to the Israelites. The extra Qur'ānic sources show that the first Muslims conquering Palestine considered themselves the newly chosen community that carried out successfully the sacred mission of the ancient Israelites. The land Palestine itself emerges in the above Qur'ānic verses as well as in the extra Qur'ānic sources as a holy abode destined to become the venue of redemption for the believers reaching it under the flag of Islam.