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FRAGMENT OF THE MONTH ARCHIVE

Al-Qaṣīda al-Fiyyāšiyya - an old-new poem found in Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts: T-

S NS 224.4 and RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1741

is accompanied by many hadiths.5

Rachel Hasson

General background The song al-Qaṣīda al-Fiyyāšiyya, or just al-Fiyyāšiyya, is a highly popular folk song. Today it is very well-known in Morocco and Algeria

modern-day performances of the song, and websites provide different versions of it with varying melodies and lengths. One official performance of the song was uploaded to YouTube as part of a gala event held in Morocco (السهرة الأندلسية الكبرى 2016) in honor of Andalusian poetry. Based on my familiarity with the song online, it appears the Moroccan singer, Abd al-Raḥīm Al-Ṣuwayrī, is the singer most identified with al-Fiyyāšiyya and is known to perform the song at the aforementioned Andalusian poetry event. However, the song can be

and is sung on the mawlid holidays. The song is performed during special events in other locations as well. The internet is flooded with

found in the repertoire of many other singers as well.² Having said that, this song is far from new. It was composed over four hundred years ago by the 16th-century Ṣūfī Sīdī 'Uthmān b. Yaḥyā,

otherwise known as Sīdī Amḥammad al-Buhlūl al-Sharqī. His ancestors were most probably born in Meknes (Morocco). However, his biography remains unknown. The song al-Qaṣīda al-Fiyyāšiyya deals with several topics, including the positive impact of God's power on human beings, salvation following adversity (al-Faraj ba'da al-Šidda), being content with little, avoiding greed, encouraging humble behavior, and so forth. Such themes strongly correspond with Sufi thought.

Al-Fiyyāšiyya falls under the genre of Arabic al-Malḥūn poetry, a dialectical folk poetry that developed in the Maghreb. This rhyming strophic poetry in all probability grew over centuries among Bedouin and spread widely from the 16th century onwards, primarily in

Morocco, Algeria and Tunis.³ It is said that Sīdī Amḥammad al-Buhlūl al-Sharqī also worked as a jeweler. One day the Sultan sent him a pearl to pierce; the pearl split in two, and the jeweler feared he would be accused of fraud in an attempt to steal half of the pearl. However, at that moment, the sultan's wife gave birth to twins, each of whom received one half of the pearl. According to tradition, this is the backdrop against which al-Buhlūl

al-Sharqī wrote al-Qaşīda al-Fiyyāšiyya.4 محمد ابن عبد الرحمان ابن علي البهنسي العقيلي الشفعي الخلوتي النقشبندي شمس The poem has been given an interpretation that is consistent with Sufi faith by . A manuscript of the essay, which dates back to 1653, is held in the Berlin State Library. Al-Khalawatī's interpretation is simplistic and

The poem is written in a North African Arabic dialect, which is very interesting of itself. However, I will refer to this aspect of the poem, as reflected in the Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts below, in another study. Research to date and Arab manuscripts of the poem

To the best of my knowledge, only two academic studies of al-Qaṣīda al-Fiyyāšiyya have been completed to date. The first, conducted by Mustafa Waza', examines an oral folk version of the poem compiled in Algeria. The second, by Haseeb Shehadeh, is based on eight

Samaritan manuscripts of the qasida.⁶

In addition, at least ten Arab manuscripts are scattered among several libraries throughout the world, namely the Royal Library in Spain, the National Library in Jerusalem (a Damascus manuscript copied in the late 17th century from the Judean Collection), and eight more manuscripts in the Royal Library in Berlin.⁷

Furthermore, two more versions of the poem, found in Cairo at the end of the 19th century, were published in the early 20th century by

M. Bouriant.⁸ The song is also found in a pamphlet entitled القصيدة الفياشية للولي الصالح سيدي بهلول الشرقي, which was printed in Casablanca by

during the 20th century and can be found online.⁹ The Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts of al-Qasīda al-Fiyyāšiyya

To my surprise, eleven Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts of the poem were found in the Cairo Genizah. Ten manuscripts belong to the Karaite Firkovitch collection and one manuscript belongs to the Taylor-Schechter Collection (T-S NS 224.4). Based on the handwriting, it appears that the manuscripts were copied in the 17th century. The manuscripts did not survive in full, and the poem only appears in its entirety in

MS RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1741. The Judaeo-Arabic material of the qasida is new and unknown.



Below is the opening of the gasida (المطلع), followed by the stanza found in the Judaeo-Arabic versions of the gasida (which is not found in the Samaritan version, for example):

אנא מא לי פייאש אש עלייא מני דור

manuscripts, whereas we find a range of titles in the Arabic manuscripts, such as: قصيدة الوفائية المعروفة بالمغربية ('Qasida of fidelity known as

Maghrebian', in a manuscript belonging to the Yahuda Collection) or القصيدة البهلولية (in the manuscripts preserved in Berlin).

יהוון בהא כול אמרן עסיר אנא עבד רבון להו קודרתון

> פרבי עלא כול שיאן קדיר ואן כונת עבדון צעיף אל קוא

נקלק מן רזקי לאש ואל כאלק ירזוקני

(From MS RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1741, fol.11v.)

Stanza (actually marks a musical break)

Free translation

I am a servant of a God who has power, with which He eases every hard matter;

And I was a servant with minimal strength, so (I have) my God who is omnipotent (see below).

Why should I be worried about my livelihood, surely the Creator will provide my livelihood;

The Jewish 'adaptation' of al-Qasīda al-Fiyyāšiyya

The poem's Muslim origin is evident in the incorporated Quranic verses: פרבי עלא כול שיאן קדיר ('My God is omnipotent') 11

Al-Qaṣīda al-Fiyyāšiyya was copied by Jews, in spite of its Muslim Sufi source.

The themes underlying the poem, such as God's praise, adherence to faith in God, contentment with little, God's goodness and so forth, were likely perceived by the Jewish community as universal notions, in accordance with Jewish religion (referred to by scholars of popular literature as 'thematic adaptation' 13), despite the allusions to verses from the Quran.

יקול למא שא כון פיכון ('He says to it: "Be", and it is') 12

I am not boastful, and what am I obligated to do?

In all likelihood, קצת אלבהלול played a ceremonial role. It was sung in the Jewish community as a song of praise to the God who preaches abstinence from worldly temptations, as a means for achieving inner happiness. Several Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts repeat a particular sentence when referring to the song, which was probably said by the cantor, the singer or the facilitator of a meeting, as demonstrated in

it includes a notebook of well-known piyyutim in addition to קצת אלבהלול: a song for Shabbat – משפיל מרים בברית הורים, ¹⁴ a song of praise by Yehuda Halevi – פיפיה לבבתיני המתיני עד, 15 Israel Najara's poem אל ישיב היכלו אל מכונו, 16 a hymn for Simchat Torah – אל ישיב היכלו אל מכונו, attributed to Shlomo Ibn Gabirol,¹⁷ and two piyyutim on the death of Moshe Rabbenu – the first, אעמוד לפני עליון נורא ואבקש, which is signed 'Shmuel', possibly referring to the poet Shmuel Ha-Kohen, and the second, אעמוד למולך, both of which are also found in a Karaite notebook with liturgical piyyutim kept in the British Museum. 18 The examples above reinforce the argument that the song קצת אלבהלול was intended for ceremonial gatherings in the Egyptian Jewish

community at the time the manuscripts were copied. Moreover, the Karaite community may have sung קצת אלבהלול, in light of the fact that

the following example: נבתדי אלאן בקצה אלבהלול (MS RNL Yevr-Arab. II: 1763), 'We will begin now with the "Story of Buhlul"'; נבתדי אלאן בקצה

קצת אלבהלול appears in some Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts alongside celebratory piyyutim and songs of praise to God. For example, in MS II: 1927, the song appears immediately after the popular Genizah song of praise to God יא רחמן. MS II: 1763 is of particular interest, because

אלבהלול ומענאה אלזהד פי אלדניא (MS RNL Yevr-Arab. II: 1927), 'We will begin now with the "Story of Buhlul", which means celibacy in the

there are many versions of the poem currently beyond my reach, I cannot state so unequivocally. Was Sīdī 'Uthmān influenced by Hebrew poetry? A specific line that caught my attention in the poem is found in the 26th stanza of MS II: 1741 and appears in all of the Arabic versions of

Judging by the Judaeo-Arabic version of the qasida, it is safe to say that the version found in MS II: 1741 highly resembles the version that appears in al-Khalawatī's commentary (the most authentic version of the gasida we have so far), yet differs from the Samaritan

version published by Shehadeh. It is possible that MS II: 1741 preserves an early and authentic version of the poem – however, seeing as

the gasida I have reviewed: קלבי כולו פי אל שרק ואנא פי אל גרב גריב Free translation: My whole heart is in the East and I am in the West a foreigner

This line is a clever translation of the opening line of the well-known poem written by the Jewish poet and philosopher of the Golden Age

לְבָּי בִמְזָרָח וְאַנֹכִי בָּסוֹף מַעַרָב (Brody, 2, 155) Free translation: My heart is in the East, and I am at the end of the West.

Beeri = בארי, ט. ישראל נג'ארה (Tel Aviv, 2015).

of Spain, Yehuda Halevi (1075–1141):

Yehuda Halevi's poem is full of contradictions and conflicts that aim to express the poet's storm of emotions, as he resides in the West, in Spain, while longing to be in the East, in the Land of Israel. The poem expresses not only the poet's intense yearning, but the emotional conflicts that hamper his ability to experience pleasure. Furthermore, he describes how he would rather leave all the riches of Spain, in exchange for seeing the dust of the destroyed Temple. 19

West, while longing for the East, which is most likely a reference to Mecca, home of the Kaʿaba.²⁰

most of the poem's Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts were found in the Firkovitch collection.

poem. However, this speculation requires further examination. In conclusion Al-Qaṣīda al-Fiyyāšiyya is a popular song that dates as far back as the 16th century in Arabic-speaking countries. The song is also

currently well-known in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. The song relates to matters concerning contentment with little, repentance, God's love for human beings, and more. The song originated in North Africa and was composed by the Sūfī Sīdī 'Uthmān b. Yaḥyā, known as Sīdī

This example may suggest that the author, Sīdī 'Uthmān, was either influenced by or, at the very least, familiar with Yehuda Halevi's

To some extent a similar dissonance appears in our poem. The poet, Sīdī 'Uthmān, is in a precarious situation. He sits in his birthplace, the

collection. The adaptation of the poem by Jews from Muslim sources confirms the strong intercultural relations that existed at that time between Jews and the Muslim society around them. This poem joins a corpus of Judaeo-Arabic written literature found in the Genizah, which reflects close ties between Jews and their Muslim neighbors.²¹

Amḥammad al-Buhlūl al-Sharqī. Apart from well-known oral versions, Samaritan manuscripts, and Arabic versions in manuscripts and print, I found eleven unknown Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts of the poem in the Cairo Genizah, most of which came from the Firkovitch

Bouriant = Bouriant, M. U. Chansons Populaires Arabes (Paris, 1893). Davidson = Davidson, I. Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry (4 vols, New York, 1970).

Footnotes

6 Shehadeh, 69-78.

Spr.1101, Pm.654, Pet.9.

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7 Real Biblioteca del Monasterio, MS Árabe 523. Wust: NLI Yah. Ar. 790. Ahlwardt: We.1735, We.1238, We.294, Spr.490, Spr.162,

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Wust = Wust, E. A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the A. S. Yahuda Collection (Jerusalem, 1997).

10 RNL Yevr.-Arab. II:1741, II:1742, II:1743, II:1763, II:1765, II:1766, II:1804, II:1927, II:1928, II:1971.

Brody = בראדי, ח. דיואן והוא ספר כולל כל שירי אביר המשוררים יהודה בן שמואל הלוי (4 vols, Berlin, 1971).

2 For example: جمال حافظ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFLWsGYQfaI سامي يوسف https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTWhNSzaYNc 3 Pellat. 4 Shehadeh, 74.

5 https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN771028881&...

8 Bouriant, 106-121. 9 https://www.scribd.com/document/322942673/

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M62E0Kjv930

12 Found, for example, in Quran, al-Bagarah 117 يَقُولُ لَهُ كُن فَيِكُونُ and frequently. 13 Honko, 12–33.

and very frequently. إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيءٍ قَديرٌ 31 Found, for example, in Quran, al-Bagarah وإنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيءٍ قَديرٌ 9

17 Davidson, No. 3730. 18 Margoliouth, 2, No. 728. I thank Dr Sara Cohen from the 'The Ezra Fleisher Institute for the study of the poetry found in the

19 Elizur, 444–447. For the possibility that Yehuda Halevi used in his poet motifs he absorbed from Muslim poets, see Razhabi, 343–344. I thank Dr Almog Behar for this reference. 20 I thank Dr Shoey Raz for this comment.

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14 Davidson, No. 2664. 15 Brody, 33. 16 Beeri, 147.

Genizah' who helped me to identify the poems.

21 For a general description of the corpus of Judaeo-Arabic popular literature in the Genizah see Hasson.

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