

Fragment of the Month: March 2018

Judaeo-Arabic Poetry in the Cairo Genizah: T-S Ar.37.127

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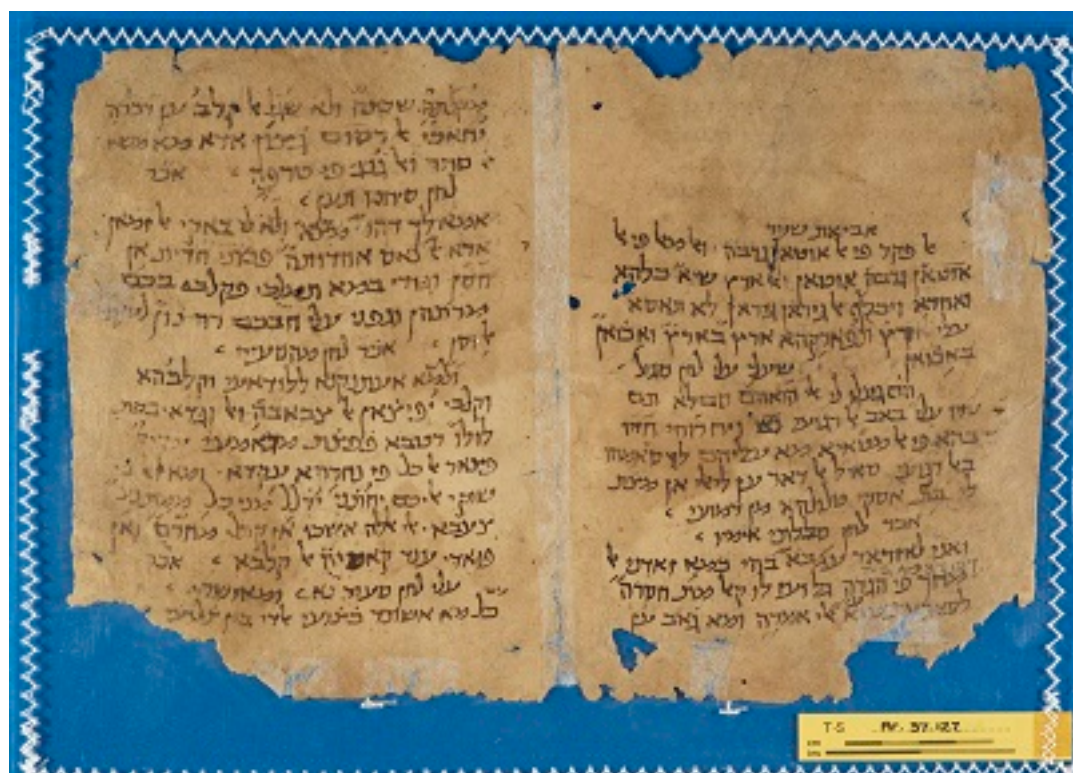
The Cairo Genizah is a most fertile resource for Jewish studies. Through its religious materials it is invaluable to the study, for example, of the Bible, Talmud, and Midrash, and with its wealth of documents, it is the source for medieval Middle Eastern Jewish history. Equally important is its contribution to the study of Hebrew poetry in general and of *piyyuṭ* (liturgical poetry).¹

Unlike Hebrew liturgical poetry, Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah is an area that has hitherto received very little attention. While many scholars have worked on the Hebrew poetry, with extensive collections collated in books and on websites,² the Arabic material has been largely neglected. If mentioned at all in catalogues, labelling is mostly limited to 'Arabic poetry', without any further details, and the large majority of sources still await description.

Poetry is one of the earliest genres of Arabic literature and certainly considered its most popular. As Arabic speakers, Jews adopted this creative literary writing in the pre-Islamic period.³ There is evidence of shared interest in poetry between Jews and Muslims from the 7th century onwards, which lasted through the ages until modern times. The emergence of secular Hebrew poetry in Andalusia was a direct consequence of exposure to Arabic poetry traditions, such as in meter and rhyme.⁴ Al-Ḥarīzī (ca. 1166–1225) was one of the Jewish poets who wrote in both Arabic and Hebrew. Medieval Judaeo-Arabic poetry (Arabic poetry written in Hebrew script) can be found in many fragments in the Cairo Genizah, which adds further evidence of this intertwined Judaeo-Islamic heritage.

A trial survey of the Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah, put together for the development of a funding proposal together with Dr Esther-Miriam Wagner, showed very encouraging results. Poetry by various Fatimid authors, such as Tamīm al-Fātīmī (948 – 984), can be found in the Cambridge Genizah Collections. The genres and poetic themes are variable and wide-ranging, including: romantic (*ḡazal*), elegy (*riṭāʿ*), descriptive (*waṣf*), eulogy (*madīḥ*), *muwašṣaḥāt* (girdled) and vernacular poetry: *zajal* (shout). Some pieces are conserved in both Arabic and Hebrew script next to each other, we can find eulogies for the Prophet, and handbooks about poetic meters.

Much of the Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah collection is written in Judaeo-Arabic. The fragment under investigation for the Fragment of the Month (T-S Ar.37.127) contains a collection of Arabic short poems or pieces of Arabic poems. One of the poems in the fragment was originally written by a famous Fatimid Muslim poet called Ibn Abi Ḥaṣīna (998 – 1064). The fragment holds three verses from the start of the original Arabic poem, which comes in 35 verses. The poem uses the most popular Arabic poetry meter al-Ṭawīl (long):



T-S Ar.37.127.1r

ولمّا اعتنقنا للوداعِ وقلبها
 وقلبي يفيضان الصباية والوجد بكت
 فحزاري كل في نحرها عكدا.

Arabic transliteration (my own transliteration)

ولمّا اعتنقنا للوداعِ وقلبها

وقلبي يفيضان الصباية والوجد بكت

Translation:

'When we hugged for farewell, at the moment that her heart and mine were full of passion and love, she shed tears of sprinkled pearls. My tears, subsequently, flooded with onyx. At that point, everything (pearls and onyx) became a necklace on her neck'.

Love poetry is also quoted in another poem in the fragment. The four-verse Arabic poem is taken from a famous Arabic book (*al-Baṣā'ir wa-l-Ḍaḳā'ir* – Insights and Treasure) written by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (923–1023), who is considered one of the most intellectual philosophers and literary writers in the 10th century. The poem reads:

T-S Ar.37.127.1r

ואני לאזדאד עגבא בהי במא זאדני אל
מחך פי הגרה גל ועז לו קאל מת חסרה
לסארעת פורא אלי אמרה ומא גאב ען
מקלה שכצה ולא שגל אל קלב ען דכרה

Arabic transliteration (my own transliteration)

ואני لأزداد عجباً به بما زادني الـ
محك في هجره جل وعز لو قال مت حسرة
لسارعت طوعاً إلى أمره وما غاب عن
مقلة شخصه ولا شغل القلب عن ذكره

Translation:

'My admiration of him increases because of what the contentious did to me during our abandonment, (God) Exalted He, if asked me to die out of grief I would have quickly followed his command, his presence has never been absent from my eyesight, the heart has never been busy to mention him'.

The next poem from the same page confirms that all poems contained in this fragment were collated under the theme of 'love poetry'. Interestingly, the Fatimid poem by Ibn Abi Ḥaṣīna is followed by a quote from a poem that belongs

to a poet called Ḳālīd al-Kātīb (died in 876) from the earlier Abbasid period, who was famous for his romantic Arabic poetry. The poem in the fragment starts with two verses which are almost the same as Ḳālīd al-Kātīb's poem available in Arabic poetry collections.⁵ However, the rest of the poem in the fragment is different from the Arabic versions available to us. The Judaeo-Arabic poem is four verses long, which makes it two verses longer than the currently existing Arabic version. There are also some different words used in the first two verses of the poem in the two versions. The poem's meter and rhythm, though, are the same in the two versions:

T-S Ar.37.127

(1r)

כלמא אשתד כצועי אלדי בין צלועי

(1v)

פי דמנת אל כד כיוול מן דמועי לא תלומנא

אד בכינא והממנא באל רגועי כל מא א

אבצרת רבעא דארס פאצת דמועי

Arabic transliteration (my own transliteration)

(1r)

כלמא אשתד כצועי אלדי בין צלועי

(1v)

פי דמנת אל כד כיוול מן דמועי לא תלמנא

אד בכינא והממנא באל רגועי כלמא א

אבצרת רבעא דארסא פאצת דמועי

Translation:

(1r)

'Every time my submission becomes stronger, which is in my chest (literally: between my ribs),

(1v)

a cavalry of my tears (roll down) the ruins of my cheek. Do not blame us

if we cry and intend to return. Every time

I see an abandoned house my tears flow’.

Whereas the version of the same poem found in the *Diwān*⁶ by Ḳālīd al-Kātīb reads:

كلما اشتد خضوعي لجوي بين ضلوعي

رَكَضَتْ فِي حَلْبَتِي خَدِي خَيْلٌ مِنْ دُمُوعِي

‘Every time my submission becomes stronger, because of the love in my chest (literally: between my ribs),

horses of my tears run in a racecourse of my cheek’.

The oldest Arabic manuscript we have of the *Diwān* by Ḳālīd al-Kātīb is a copy dated to the year 1698.⁷ From the style of the Genizah fragment in terms of its Arabic vocalisation and the Hebrew script used, one can estimate that the fragment is roughly dated to the 13th–14th century. This suggests that the poem found in the fragment is the oldest extant version of this Arabic poem by Ḳālīd al-Kātīb. This example is not the only case in which Judaeo-Arabic poems found in the Genizah fragments differ from the Arabic poems available in Arabic poetry collections. A survey of some Judaeo-Arabic poems found in other fragments in the Cairo Genizah reveals the same phenomena.

This confirms the extreme importance of the Cairo Genizah as an abundant resource for Arabic literature and Arabic poetry and shows the need for further study of the Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah.

Acknowledgement:

I would like to thank Drs Esther-Miriam Wagner and Ben Outhwaite for their thorough reading and comments on the draft.

1 For more information about Hebrew secular poetry in the Cairo Genizah, see Yeshaya, Joachim J.M.S. 2010. *Medieval Hebrew poetry in Muslim Egypt: the secular poetry of the Karaite poet Moses ben Abraham Darī*. Leiden: Brill. For information about *piyyuṭ*, see Fleischer, Ezra. 1975. *Shirat ha-kodesh ha-Ivrit bi-me habbenayim* [Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in the Middle Ages]. Jerusalem: Keter.

2 There are more than 88,000 titles of Hebrew liturgical poems (*piyyuṭim*) that were cataloged by “The Ezra Fleischer Geniza Research Project for Hebrew Poetry”. See also Davidson, Israel, and Jefim Schirmann. 1970. *Otsar ha-shirah yeha-piyyuṭ* [Thesaurus of mediaeval Hebrew poetry]. New York: Ktav Pub. House.

3 For instance, the Jewish poet Samaw'al ibn Jarīd ibn 'Ādiyā' who lived in Arabia during the 6th century. For more information, see Jacobs Joseph and Mary W. Montgomery. 1906. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 11. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, pp. 14–15.

4 Schippers, Arie. 1994. *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition: Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry*. Leiden: Brill; Cole, Peter. 2007. *The Dream of the Poem Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950– 1492*. Princeton University Press.

5 Sadir, Karin. 2006. *Dīwān Ḳālid al-Kātib: A Critical Edition*. Publications of Syrian Ministry of Culture: Aleppo [in Arabic], p. 399.

6 Ibid, p. 399.

7 Ibid, pp. 40 – 41.

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