

# **An Initial Survey of Arabic Poetry in the Cairo Genizah<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The Cairo Genizah has shown its importance as a fruitful source for the study of both liturgical and secular Hebrew poetry. Yet, although the Cairo Genizah also contains hundreds of poetry fragments written in the Arabic language, its Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic poetry has hitherto received inadequate attention in research literature. This paper explores some of the Genizah's Arabic poems written in both Hebrew and Arabic script, which are held at the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collections of Cambridge University Library. The paper concludes with a discussion about the importance of the Cairo Genizah to the study of Arabic literature and poetry, and Islamic studies in general, as well as a source for the study of the dissemination of knowledge within medieval Muslim and Jewish elites.

## **Keywords**

**The Cairo Genizah; Arabic Poetry; Judaeo-Arabic; Piyyut**

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## 1 Introduction

The Cairo Genizah Collections at Cambridge University Library are some of the most significant resources to study the history, languages and cultures of medieval and modern Eastern Mediterranean societies. They contain thousands of fragments written in Judaeo-Arabic (Arabic written in Hebrew script), Hebrew, and Arabic. Cambridge University Library holds the largest part of the Cairo Genizah with about 200,000 fragments of the circa 300,000 fragments that are dispersed around the world.

The Cairo Genizah is a most fertile resource for historical Jewish studies in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean. 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 richest source for medieval Middle Eastern Jewish history.

Equally important is the Cairo Genizah's contribution to the study of Hebrew poetry in general and of *piyyuṭ* in particular.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the study of Hebrew liturgical poetry started to flourish after the discovery of the Cairo Genizah.<sup>3</sup> This includes the diachronic study of the development

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<sup>2</sup> *Piyyuṭ* is Hebrew liturgical poetry that emerged firstly in Palestine during the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. With the emergence of Islam in the Arabian peninsula, *piyyuṭ* composition flourished widely among Jewish communities and was popular within the main two Jewish prayer rites at the time, Palestinian and Babylonian, see Michael Rand, "Paytanic Hebrew", in: *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan. Consulted online on 30 March 2018 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-4241\\_ehll\\_EHLL\\_COM\\_00000680](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-4241_ehll_EHLL_COM_00000680)  
For more information about *Piyyuṭ*, see Ezra Fleischer, *Hebrew liturgical poetry in the Middle Ages [in Hebrew]* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007), see also Menahem Schmelzer, "The Contribution of the Genizah to the Study of Liturgy and Poetry", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 63 (1997): 164. doi:10.2307/3622601.

<sup>3</sup> From a historical perspective, the study of manuscripts of Hebrew liturgical poetry was impossible before the emergence of Genizah materials. Over the centuries, many poems of early *piyyuṭ* were being kept in Jewish prayer books, but only the discovery of the Genizah allowed researchers to put their hands on early *piyyuṭ* fragments,

of Hebrew sacred poetry, the liturgical culture associated with poetry and the study of the difference between various poetry schools and writing styles in line with Jewish communities from the medieval period until modern times.<sup>4</sup>

The Cairo Genizah was also a fruitful source for the study of Hebrew secular poetry. The amount of Hebrew secular poems, estimated to be some thousands of fragments, is, however, not comparable to the great corpus of Hebrew poetry written for religious purposes. Still, the secular poetry in the Genizah preserves unique pieces that were not discovered in any other sources.<sup>5</sup>

Most studies conducted on Cairo Genizah fragments were mainly concerned with Jewish scholarship. In recent years, however, scholars from other fields have discovered the importance of the Genizah for the social, historical and intellectual study of the Middle East in general. Work on projects concerned with documents written by government officials has, for example, begun in

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including hundreds of fragments of Yannai (sixth century CE), who is considered the first *payyeṭan*, among others, see Laura S. Lieber, *Piyyut* (Jewish liturgical and secular poetry), in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, eds Roger S Bagnall et al. (2012). doi:[10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah11186](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah11186); For more information on Yannai and his liturgical poetry, see Israel Davidson, *Mahzor Yannai: A Liturgical Work of the VIIth Century* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1919).

<sup>4</sup> Ezra Fleischer, “The Contribution of the Geniza to the Study of Medieval Hebrew Religious Poetry”, in *Te ‘uda. I. Cairo Genizah Studies* [in Hebrew], ed. Mordechai A. Friedman (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1980), p. 84; For more information on the contribution of the Cairo Genizah to the study of the Hebrew *piyyuṭ*, see Menahem Schmelzer, “The Contribution of the Genizah to the Study of Liturgy and Poetry Sources”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 63 (1997–2001): 163–179.

<sup>5</sup> Hayyim Schirmann, “Secular Hebrew Poetry in the Geniza Manuscripts”, in *Te ‘uda. I. Cairo Genizah Studies [in Hebrew]*, ed. Mordechai A. Friedman (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1980), pp. 97–123. To give an example, the Cairo Genizah has provided us with information about the life of Judah ha-Levi (1075–1141 CE), who wrote both religious and secular Hebrew poetry in Spain, as were for example identified by Goitein, see Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society, Volume V: The Individual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 448–468. Other well-known poets who wrote secular poetry were also identified in Cairo Genizah fragments, including Samuel ha-Nagid, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra and Abraham ibn Ezra, see Menahem Schmelzer. “The Contribution of the Genizah to the Study of Liturgy and Poetry Source”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 63 (1997–2001): 176.

Princeton under the direction of Prof. Marina Rustow, showing the connections between the Muslim courts and the Jewish communities through the agency of Jewish clerks and scribes.<sup>6</sup>

The Cairo Genizah adds new perspectives to other fields of Arabic studies too, with scholars discovering the usefulness of the materials for their own field in recent years.<sup>7</sup> Pertaining to Arabic poetry, a treasure trove of fragments is still waiting to be discovered. In the following sections, this paper will examine examples of Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic poetry found in the Genizah which appear to have circulated in Egypt among Jewish communities in the medieval and later periods.

## 2 Arabic language poetry in the Cairo Genizah

### 2.1 Overview

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.<sup>8</sup> There is evidence of shared interest in poetry between Jews and Muslims from the seventh century onwards, which lasted through the ages until modern times. The emergence of secular Hebrew poetry in al-Andalus was a direct consequence of exposure to Arabic poetic traditions.<sup>9</sup> Al-Ḥarīzī

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<sup>6</sup> For more information about the study of Arabic script legal documents from the Cairo Genizah, see Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> See for example Bilal W. Orfali and Maurice A. Pomerantz, “A Lost Maqāma of Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadānī?”, *Arabica* 60 (2013): 245–271.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, the Jewish poet Samaw’al ibn Jarīd ibn ‘Ādiyā’ who lived in Arabia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. For more information, see Jacobs Joseph and Mary W. Montgomery, *The Jewish Encyclopedia II* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), pp. 14–15.

<sup>9</sup> Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition: Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950–1492* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

(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)<sup>10</sup> can be found in many fragments in the Cairo Genizah, which adds further evidence of this intertwined Judaeo-Islamic heritage.

Unlike the Hebrew liturgical and secular poetry discussed above, Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah is an area that has hitherto received very little attention.<sup>11</sup> While many scholars have worked on the Hebrew poetry, with extensive collections collated in books and on websites,<sup>12</sup> the Arabic material has been largely neglected. If mentioned at all in catalogues, identification and labelling is mostly limited to “Arabic poetry”, without any further details, and the large majority of sources still await description.

## 2.2 *Judaeo-Arabic poetry*

A trial survey of the Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah showed very encouraging results. Poetry by various Fatimid authors, such as Tamīm al-Fātīmī (948–984) and Ibn Abī Ḥuṣayna (998–1064) can be found alongside older poems composed by famous Abbasid poets, like Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī (932–967), al-Khubzaruzzī (d. 939) and Khālid al-Kātib (d. 876).

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<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Khan, “Judaeo-Arabic.” in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Lutz Edzard & Rudolf de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 526–536.

<sup>11</sup> Hartwig Hirschfeld published two articles about some Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah, see “The Arabic portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 15 (January 1903): 167–181; “The Arabic portion of the Cairo Genizah at Cambridge: A poem attributed to AlSamau’al”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 17 (April 1905): 431–440.

<sup>12</sup> There are more than 88,000 titles of Hebrew liturgical poems *piyyuṭim* that were catalogued by “The Ezra Fleischer Geniza Research Project for Hebrew Poetry”. See also Israel Davidson and Jefim Schirman, *Otsar ha-shirah yeha-piyuṭ [Thesaurus of mediaeval Hebrew poetry]* (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1970).

The genres and poetic themes are variable and wide-ranging, including: love poetry (*ghazal*),<sup>13</sup> elegy (*rithā'*),<sup>14</sup> descriptive poetry (*wasf*),<sup>15</sup> eulogy (*madīh*),<sup>16</sup> a strophic poetic form (*muwashshah*),<sup>17</sup> dialectical poetry, or “shout” (*zajal*).<sup>18</sup> 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 metres.

In the following the paper explores a selection of some Arabic poems written in both Hebrew and Arabic script held at the Cairo Genizah collection in the Cambridge University Library. The

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<sup>13</sup> The term *ghazal* refers to the poet's description of the beloved woman, his love and longing for her. From a historical point of view, *ghazal* has a long record in Arabic literary traditions. Arabic love poetry was developed throughout centuries; from pre-Islamic period until modern times. Each period, such as pre-Islamic, Fatimid and Abbasid, has its unique features of *ghazal* poetry. See Kamāl Khalāyī, *Jamharat rawā'i al-ghazal fī l-shi'r al-'Arabī*, (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabīya lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1993); Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, *Encyclopedia of Arabic literature* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 249–250.

<sup>14</sup> *rithā'*, means also dirge or lament, refers to a traditional Arabic poetic genre that emerged from pre-Islamic period. *rithā'* mainly was composed by women to bewail their next of kin. Al-Khansā' (died 665 CE) was among the most famous poets for her *marāthi* poems on her two brothers. Not only women, but also male poets started to compose and to develop *rithā'* writing after the beginning of Islam. For more information, see Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 663–664.

<sup>15</sup> *wasf*, meaning “description” in Arabic, is a poetic Arabic literary tradition used to describe certain objects thoroughly and considered a key element in Arabic poetry. The pre-Islamic poets start their poems mostly with *wasf* to describe the journey, the beloved or to describe the wine, see 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Qināwī, *al-Wasf fī l-shi'r al-'arabī* (Cairo: Sharikat Maktabāt wa-Matba'āt Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Halabī wa-Awlādihī, 1949), p. 44. See also Akiko Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Wasf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> *madīh* is a generic Arabic term that describes the panegyric poetry. *madīh* is considered one of the oldest types of Arabic poetry, and includes the praise of rulers, heroes, the prophet Muḥammad and God. See Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 482–484.

<sup>17</sup> pl. *muwashshahāt*, originally emerged in Spain. *muwashshah* usually composed of five stanzas, in which each stanza has a certain rhyme system. The initial part of the last stanza contains the *kharja* (exit), which is usually composed in colloquial Arabic or Romance. For more information about the *muwashshah*, see Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 563–566; Arie Schippers, “Muwaššah”, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Lutz Edzard et al. Accessed March 20, 2018. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1570-6699\\_eall\\_EALL\\_SIM\\_000011](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1570-6699_eall_EALL_SIM_000011).

<sup>18</sup> *zajal*, a dialectical poetry, donates diverse types of poems composed in colloquial Arabic. For more information see Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 819.

poems are transcribed and also transliterated into Arabic script, followed by an English translation.

### 2.3 Love poetry

The genre of Arabic love poetry is a favourite of Arabic literature.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is no surprise to see that many poems found in the Cairo Genizah are written within a love theme. The Genizah love poetry is composed in different poetic styles and comes from various time periods, as will be shown below. To begin with, in the fragment T-S Ar.13.4, there are two verses of an Arabic poem written by a famous Abbasid poet known by his nickname al-Khubzaruzzī (d. 939 CE).<sup>20</sup> The poem is written in the Arabic poetic metre *al-kāmil*<sup>21</sup> and reads:

#### T-S Ar.13.4 (2r)<sup>22</sup>

ביני ובינך יא טלום אלמוקפו אלחאכם אלעדל אלגואד אלמנצפו

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<sup>19</sup> The majority of Arabic poets wrote ghazal poetry, see Khalāyilī, *Jamhara*, 12. See also, Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1998), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> His full name was Naṣr ibn Aḥmad ibn Ma'mūn al-Baṣrī Abu al-Qāsim. He was famous for his *ghazal* poetry. His nickname *al-Khubzaruzzī* came from his work as a baker of a certain Iraqi bread. For more information, see Muḥammad Ḥasan Āl-Yāsīn, "Edition of Dīwān al-Khubzaruzzī, Naṣr ibn Aḥmad al-Baṣrī", *Iraqi Academy of Science Journal* 40 (1) (1989): 93–95. See also Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 443. Al-Tha'ālibī provided an entry about the poet al-Khubzaruzzī which includes a considerable number of his poems: 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad Tha'ālibī, *Yatīmat al-Dahr fī maḥāsīn ahl al-'aṣr*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Qumayḥa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 2000), 428–432. Āl-Yāsīn edited a manuscript of the al-Khubzaruzzī Dīwān, which he claims to be the only extant manuscript of al-Khubzaruzzī.

<sup>21</sup> The Arabic poetic metre *al-'arūd* was developed by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 718–786 CE). There are 16 types of Arabic metres. Each metre *baḥr* has its unique structure, which depends mainly on rhythmic core that alternates between longer and shorter prosodic segments. For more information, see Abū l-Faṭḥ 'Uṭmān Ibn Jinnī, *Kitāb al-'arūd*, ed. Aḥmad al-Hayb (Kuwayt: Dār al-Qalam, 1987); 'Abd al-'azīz 'Atīq, *ilm Al-'arūd wa-al-Qāfiya* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabīyah lil-Ṭibā'a wa-al-Nashr, 1967); Dmitry Frolov, *Classical Arabic Verse: History and Theory of 'Arūd* (Leyde: Brill, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> All Arabic transliterations and English translations in this paper have been done by the author.

ולקד כשית באן אמות צבאבה אסף עליך ואנת לא תתעטפו

**Arabic transliteration:**

ביני ובינך יא ظلوم الموقف الحاکم العدل الجواد المنصف  
ولقد خشيت بأن أموت صباباً أسف عليك وأنت لا تتعطف

**Translation:**

“O tyrant, between you and me is an opinion, (which is) a fair just honest judge.

I was afraid of dying out of love, I am sorry about you, and you do not sympathise.”

When comparing this Judaeo-Arabic version to the version of the same Arabic poem found in Arabic poetry databases, it reads slightly differently. In the paper by Āl-Yāsīn,<sup>23</sup> the version of the same poem reads as:

ביני ובינך יא ظلوم الموقف [ו]الحاکم العدل الجواد المنصف  
فلقد خشيت بأن أموت بغصنتي أسفاً عليك وأنت لا تتعطف

**Translation:**

“O tyrant, between you and me is an opinion and a fair just honest judge.

I was afraid of dying with sorrow (in my heart) being sorry about you, and you do not sympathise.”

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<sup>23</sup> Āl-Yāsīn, “al-Khubzaruzzi”, vol 40 (3 & 4): 132.

The paper by Āl-Yāsīn provides an edition of Dīwān al-Khubzaruzzī based on a manuscript held in the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts in Cairo, which is dated to September 1776.<sup>24</sup> The comparison between the version of the Arabic poem in the Cairo Genizah fragment and the version edited by Āl-Yāsīn shows some variations. The first verse is the same in the two versions. Only Āl-Yāsīn added the Arabic conjunction *wāw* between brackets before the word *al-Ḥākim* “judge” supplied by a comment in the footnote says: “an addition, which is required from the context”.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the addition of the Arabic conjunction *wāw* by Āl-Yāsīn has changed the meaning of the whole verse.<sup>26</sup> Apparently, the original poem contained no *wāw* in the first verse. The difference in the second verse between the two poem versions is the phrase (أموت بغصّتي) instead of (أموت صبايةً). Another variation occurs in the second verse, it starts with (ولقد) in the fragment version of the poem, whereas it begins with (فلقد) in the Arabic edited version. These are slight variations between the two versions, and they do not affect the poem regarding metre and rhyme.

The Cairo Genizah does not only hold classical love poetry, but it has preserved early modern poetry as well. The Judaeo-Arabic fragment T-S NS 31.19 contains several verses from a popular poem attributed to Aḥmad bin Sa‘īd al-Busa‘īdī (1710–1783 CE), who was the first ruler of Oman. Later the poem was turned into a song, which was popular in the Gulf during the early twentieth century. The poem is written in the poetic metre *al-kāmil*:<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Āl-Yāsīn, “al-Khubzaruzzī”, vol 40 (1): 97.

<sup>25</sup> Arabic: “زيادة يقتضيها السياق”, see Āl-Yāsīn, “al-Khubzaruzzī”, vol 40 (3 & 4): 132.

<sup>26</sup> See the variations in the English translations of the two versions.

<sup>27</sup> This song was played first by the Bahraini singer Dhāḥī ibn Walīd (1898–1941), and afterwards by the Kuwaiti singer ‘Awad al-Dūkhī (1932–1979).

**T-S NS 31.19 (r1):**

יא מן הוואה עזהו ואדלני כיה

אלפ סביל אלא וצאלך דלני

וצאלתני למא מלוכת חשאשתי

ואגבת מן ב[עד] אלוצאל הגרתני

**Transliteration:**

יא מן הוא אעה ואדלני כיה

אלפ סביל אל וצאלך דלני

וצאלתני למא מלכת חשאשתי<sup>28</sup>

ואגבת מן ב[עד] الوصال هجرتني

**Translation:**

“O whose love strengthened him and humiliated me

How to reach you? Guide me!

You were intimate with me when you owned my last breath of life,

and you replied after coupling, you departed from me”.

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<sup>28</sup> The Judaeo-Arabic spells this word with long vowel *wāw*, *wāṣaltanī*, instead of *waṣaltanī* in the Arabic version of the poem, probably in an effort to mark the /a/ vowel. Similarly we find *malukta*, instead of *malakta*.

This poem suggests that modern Arabic poetry from the eighteenth century was also popular among Jews at the time, enabling us to trace the historical development of Jewish-Muslim heritage regarding Arabic literature and Arabic poetry in the Ottoman period.

Another beautiful piece of Arabic love poetry is found in the fragment T-S Ar.37.127, which contains a collection of Arabic short poems or pieces of Arabic poems. One of the poems in the fragment was written by a famous Fatimid poet called Ibn Abī Ḥuṣayna (998–1064).

The fragment holds two verses from a long Arabic poem in *Dīwān* Ibn Abī Ḥuṣayna, which comes in 35 verses and uses the most popular Arabic poetic metre al-Ṭawīl.<sup>29</sup> The two verses in the fragment are exactly the same as the two verses found in the complete poem in Ibn Abī Ḥuṣayna's *Dīwān*, which is written in the Arabic poetic metre *al-ṭawīl*:

#### **T-S Ar.37.127 (1r)**

ולמָא אעתנקנא ללודאעי וקלבהא

וקלבי יפיצאן אל צבאבהּ ואל וגדא. בפת

לולוֹ רטבא פפצת מדאמעי עקיקִ

פצאר אל כל פי נחרהא עקדא.

#### **Arabic transliteration:**

ولمّا اعتنقنا للوداع وقلبها

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<sup>29</sup> Ibn Abī Ḥuṣayna and Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, *Dīwān Ibn Abī Ḥuṣayna*, ed. Muḥammad As‘ad Ṭalas (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1999), p. 227.

وقلبي يفيضان الصباية والوجد بكت

لؤلؤاً رطباً ففاضت مدامعي عقيقاً

فصار الكل في نحرها عقداً

**Translation:**

“When we embraced 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.<sup>30</sup>

At that point, everything (pearls<sup>31</sup> and onyx) became a necklace on her neck”.

A beautiful piece of *ghazal* poetry is found in T-S NS 164.173, which also shows Tiberian

Hebrew vocalisation.<sup>32</sup> The poem comes in Arabic poetic metre *majzū’ al-ramal*, and reads:

**T-S NS 164.173 (1v)**

כּם בּדוּרְן פּי אֶלְסַבְאִיא

דָּאת נוּרְן בְּאֶלְמַרְאִיא

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<sup>30</sup> *‘aqīq*, or Onyx is mostly connected to the red coloured jewels and is used to describe some fruits, like pomegranate and berries, see the various conventions of the term in Shihāb al-Dīn Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī funūn al-Adab*, Vol. 11 (Cairo: al-Mu’assasa al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil-Ta’līf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Ṭibā‘a wa-l-Nashr, 1998), pp. 33, 57, 93, 102–105, 111–116, 255, 270, 282. Thus, the term *‘aqīq* (onyx) may refer in this verse, probably, to tears of blood.

<sup>31</sup> Pearls in Arabic poetry used to refer to tears. For the reference of pearls that describe tears and teeth at the same time, see for instance Thomas Bauer, *Die badī‘iyya des Nāṣif al-Yāziḡī und das Problem der spätosmanischen arabischen Literatur*, in *Reflections on Reflections: Near Eastern Writers Reading Literature: Dedicated to Renate Jacobi*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas C. Islebe, and Renate Jacobi (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2006), p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> For more information about the Tiberian vocalisation, see Geoffrey Khan, “Vocalised Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah”, in *From Sacred Source: Genizah Studies in Honour of Professor Stefan C. Reif. Cambridge Genizah Studies Series*, ed. Ben Outhwaite and Siam Bhayro (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 201–218.

<https://doi.org/10.1163/EJ.9789004190580.1-420.53>.

ותגורן ותנאיא אברזון[ה]

לקמנאיא

בשעורן וצדורן אה מן

האדי אלבלאיא

אה מן פעל אלכטאיא

אנקעתנא פיאקרזאיא

**Arabic transliteration:**<sup>33</sup>

כִּם בְּדוֹרֵי السְבָיَا

ذَات نُوْرٍ بِالْمَرَايَا

وَتُغَوِّرُ وَتُنَايَا أُبْرُزُوهُ[ل]

لِلْمَنَايَا

بِشُعُورٍ وَصُدُورٍ أَهْ مِنْ

هَذِي الْبِلَايَا

أَهْ مِنْ فَعْلِ الْخَطَايَا

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<sup>33</sup> There are two grammatical mistakes in the poem according to prescriptive grammar. The first is the nominative case of the noun *bidūrun* (full moons), which should be in the genitive case *bidūrin*. The word *kam* does not enquire about measurement or numbers. Therefore, *bidūrin* is not a *tamyīz* in this verse. According to the context, the poet wonders of the countless number of women who are in captivity. For more information about the different cases of *tamyīz* and expressions of measures, see David Justice, *The Semantics of Form in Arabic in the Mirror of European Languages* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub. Co, 1987), pp. 316–320. The other mistake is found in the noun *nūrun* (light), which should be in the genitive case *nūrin* instead.

**Translation:**

“How many full moons<sup>34</sup> in the captivity,  
with light (reflected) in the mirrors,  
with mouths and front teeth, they exposed them to  
fate,  
with hair and breasts. I suffer from  
such calamity.  
I suffer from conducting sins  
that brought me to disasters.”

The poem in this fragment not only shows the importance of the Cairo Genizah as an abundant source for the study of Arabic poetry that was being circulated among the Jewish community in Egypt in the medieval period but also provides us with information about the reading tradition of Arabic poetry at the time.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Arabic term *badr* (full moon), pl. *bidūr*, is typically compared to the beauty of the beloved in Arabic poetry. Arabic poetry uses metaphors to describe women’s beauty indirectly. For instance, the moon and the face of a beautiful woman became synonymous, see for instance Yaḥya Ma’rūf and ‘Āḩī Bayāt, “Jamāliyyāt al-tagħazzul bil-rimūz al-’unṭawiyya fī al-shi’r al-jāhili’”, *Faṣaliyyat al-Naqd w-al-Adab al-Muqāran Journal* 2 (2012): 133–135; Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, 222–226.

<sup>35</sup> Because of the Tiberian vocalisation, the poem in this fragment presents a special case of poetry written in Judaeo-Arabic. The vocalisation provides us with a close picture of the actual reading of the poem. It is interesting to note that the poem reads the long /ā/ with long *imāla* /ē/, such as (אָלְסַבְיֵי) *al-sabēyē*, instead of the regular reading without *imāla*: *al-sabāyā*. This is repeated in all long vowel /ā/ cases in the poem, see for instance: (אָלְמַרְאֵי). Similar to this case, Khan pointed out that the manner of representing Hebrew vowels in Arabic script by Karaite scribes

## 2.4 Love poem from the book “*Alf layla wa-layla*” (A Thousand and One Nights)

Another piece of love poetry found in the fragment T-S NS 102.104, written in Arabic poetic metre *al-kāmil*, is very similar to a poem taken from one copy of the famous Arabic book “*Alf layla wa-layla*”.<sup>36</sup>

### T-S NS 102.104 (1r):

שוקי אליך [.....] דיד ואלדמע

יגרח מקלתי ויזיד

חשמ אלזמאן כמה סעא בפראקנא

אן אלפראק עלי אלמחב שדיד

### Arabic transliteration:

شوقي إليك [.....] ديد والدمع

يجرح مقلتي ويزيد

حشم الزمان كما سعا بفراقنا

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reflects the Tiberian pronunciation tradition, see Geoffrey Khan, “Vowel Length and Syllable Structure in the Tiberian Tradition of Biblical Hebrew”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32/1 (1987): 29.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/XXXII.1.23>

<sup>36</sup>*Alf layla wa-layla: a 'nī Kitāb Alf layla wa-layla*, ed. William Hay MacNaghten (Calcutta, 1839), II: 235. It is important to note that the most accurate edition of the book *Alf layla wa-layla* was edited by Muḥsin Mahdī: *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla Wa-layla) From the Earliest Known Sources: Arabic Text Edited With Introduction and Notes By Muhsin Mahdi*, (Leiden: Brill, 1984). The Arabic poem in the fragment T-S NS 102.104 is not found in Mahdī’s edition. However, it is quite interesting to show how Arabic poems were circulated in various Judaeo-Arabic resources.

**Translation:**

“My longing for you [...] and tears

wound my eyes and even more.

Time is put to shame as it strives to separate between us.

For the lover, painful is the separation.”

The poem in the fragment is similar to a poem in the book “A Thousand and One Nights” in terms of poetic metre and the rhyme. However, there are some variations between the two versions. Unfortunately, the first half of the first verse in the fragment is stained, and only two words can be clearly identified. These two words are the same in the Arabic version of the poem (شوقي إليك [ج-ديد]). Another variation in the same verse is the use of the verb (قَرَح), which means to become gangrenous, instead of the verb (بجرح), which means to injure. The significant difference, however, is in the second verse, which starts with a completely different sentence in the first half of the verse:<sup>37</sup>

شوقي إليك على الزمان جديد ... والدمع قَرَح مقلتي ويزيد

وإذا بكيت بكيت من الم الجوى ... إن الفراق على المحب شديد

**Translation:**

“My longing to you for the time is new and tears

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<sup>37</sup> *Alf layla wa-layla*: 235.

injured my eyes and more they do.

If I weep, I do because of the pain of love.

For the lover painful is the separation.”

This example shows how poetry citations from the most well-known Arabian folk-tale books were being quoted and read in Jewish circles.

The variations in this poem, among other examples in this paper, shed light on the potential benefit of the fragments of the Cairo Genizah Collections to the study of Arabic poetry. Further studies will allow us to compare different sources, amend weak versions or perhaps find new poems.

## 2.5 *muwashshah*

The *muwashshah* – or “a strophic poetic form”, plural *muwashshahāt*, is strophic poetry in classical Arabic. It was established and developed in Muslim Spain from the ninth century. The *muwashshah* usually consists of a multi-lined strophic verse poem written in classical Arabic, usually consisting of five stanzas, alternating with a “*kharja* - exit” with a running rhyme. The *muwashshah* starts with one or two lines which matched the second part of the poem in rhyme and metre. Although the biggest part of the *muwashshah* is mostly written in classical Arabic, the *kharja* comes typically in colloquial Arabic, sometimes in Romance.<sup>38</sup>

There is a considerable number of fragments in the Cairo Genizah that contain Arabic *muwashshahāt* written in Judaeo-Arabic. One fragment (T-S Ar.36.129) has a complete Arabic

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<sup>38</sup> For more information, see Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 563–566; Arie Schippers, “Muwaššah”, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, ed. Lutz Edzard et al. Accessed March 20, 2018. doi:[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1570-6699\\_eall\\_EALL\\_SIM\\_000011](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1570-6699_eall_EALL_SIM_000011).

*muwashshah*, which is found in an Arabic book about the art of *muwashshah* written by the well-known Muslim poet Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk (1155–1211).<sup>39</sup>

**T-S Ar.36.129 (1r):**

כס באלקדוד אליאק תחת אללמם . מן אקמר עואט . באנמל ובנאן

מתל אלענם למ תנבר ללעאט .

אהוי רשא סאחרא . מנה אלהוי מא אקתלה . קד מסכת טאירא .

אלחאטטה קלבי ולה . ולם יזל סאגרא עלי למי קד עללה . יא חאכמא

גאירא קתלת מן לא דנב לה . למא גדא קאדרא אצחי קליל אלמעדלה

כף סטות אלרחמן אדא חכם . בין אלברי ואלכאט . סטות באל

הימאן טלמא ולם . תסתבצרי יא סאטי .

יא מן ירום רשדי . דע בלנבי הדא אלעתאב . קד דבת מן תעבי

סקמא פמא נקוי תעב . באס אלהוי צעב לכל מן דאק צעב .

רמית באלאגפאן (מ)תל אלסהאם וצחת מן אניאטי . קד רדת אל

אגפאן קלבי דמים . מא צבת לי כיאט .

הן אלטבא אלשמוס . קניצהן אלציגם . מא אן להא מן כנס . אלא אלקלוב

אל הים . אל קרב מנהא ערם . ואל בעד מנהא מאתם . תלך אל

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<sup>39</sup> Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, *Dār al-ṭirāz fī 'amal al-muwashshahāt*, ed. Jawdat Rikābī (Beirut: al-Maṭba'at al-Kāthūlīkīya, 1949), 60.

אלשפאה אל לעס . ישפי בהן אל מגרם . להא לחאט נעם . תרנו אלי מן תסקם .

באעין גר'א ותבתסם . ען גוהר אל אסמאט . קצא להא אל

גיראן אן תכתתם . פי מצמר אל אנמאט .

### Arabic transliteration:

كم في القنود اللياق تحت اللّم من أقر عَوَاطٍ بأثْمَلٍ وبنان

مثل العنّم لم تنبر للعَاطِ

أهوى رشاً ساحراً هواه لي ما أقتله . قد مسخت طائراً

الحاظه قلبي وله . ولم يزل ساجراً علي لما قد علله . يا حاكماً

جايراً قتلت من لا ذنب له . لما غدا قادراً أضحي قليل المعدله

خف سطوة الرحمن إذا حكم . بين البري والخطي . سطوت بالـ

هيمن ظلماً ولم تستبصر يا ساطي .

من يروم رشدي . دع بالنبي هذا العتاب . قد ذبت من تعب .

سقما فما نقوى تعب . كأس الهوى صعب . لكل من ذاق صعب .

رمىت بالأجفان مثل السهام وصحت من أنياط<sup>40</sup> . قد ردت الـ

أجفان قلبي ذميم . ما صببت لخياط .

هن الظباء الشُّموس . قنيصهن الضيغم . ما إن لها من كُنُس . إلا القلوب

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<sup>40</sup> Singular *nūt*, means a heart or a vein in the heart, see Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, *Dār al-ṭirāz*, 146.

الهِيم . القرب منها عُرس . والبعد عنها مآثم . تلك الـ

شفاه اللُغس . يشفى بهنّ المغرم . لها لحاظ نُغس . ترنو إلى من تسقم

بأعين غرًا وتبتسم . عن جوهر الأسماط . قضى لها الـ

غيران أن تكنتم . في مُضْمَر الأنماط.

### Translation:

“How many long necks<sup>41</sup> like moons are hidden under perfect body shapes with long hair, with fingertips and fingers like ‘*anam* tree,<sup>42</sup> which were not for sale.<sup>43</sup>

I love a charming Gazelle.<sup>44</sup> Its love is a murderer. I have metamorphosed into a bird, its eyes have driven my heart mad. It is still imprisoned because of what happened to it. O oppressive ruler

you have killed someone without guilt. When he came into power, he became less just.

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<sup>41</sup> In Arabic classical poetry, women’s beauty was governed by some physical features, such as whiteness, big eyes, tallness and a long neck, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic culture* (Princeton: NJ: Markus Wiener, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> *al-‘anam* is a name of an Arabic tree with delicate branches which was likened to the fingertips of girls, singular ‘*anama*, see: Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol.12 (Beirut: dār Ṣādr, 1992), p. 429. See also Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Willams & Norgate, 1863), p. 2178.

<sup>43</sup> Literally: “which were not bestowed upon any payer”.

<sup>44</sup> The comparison between the beloved woman and the gazelle is considered one of the most common features of classical Arabic love poetry, see Ma‘rūf and Bayāt, “Jamāliyyāt al-taghazzul”, 135–136; Meisami and Starkey, *Encyclopedia*, 249.

Respect the authority of *the Most Merciful* (God) when he arbitrates between innocent and guilty.

You, captor, have unjustly subjugated

the man madly in love (with you), and you did not contemplate.

You who searches for reasonableness, by the prophet abandon your blame. I have dissolved because of tiredness. Being ill and cannot sustain this tiredness. The cup of love is oppressive.

oppressive it is for who tasted it.

I was thrown by eyelids which were like arrows, and I cried from the (pain) in my heart. The

eyelids made my

heart miserable.<sup>45</sup>

They are the Gazelles like suns, ferocious lion is their hunting.<sup>46</sup> They have no shelters but

passionate hearts. To be near to them is joy. To keep away from them is grief. These beautiful

lips<sup>47</sup> the lover is healed by them. They have downturned eyes, which look at the person being

infected by them with deceiving eyes and then they (the eyes) laugh. About the thread (of a pearl

necklace)

The Jealous ruled that she must keep it secret, deeply hidden”.

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<sup>45</sup> The Arabic sentence (ما صبت لخياط) is obscure.

<sup>46</sup> The poet in this verse compares the beloved women to the gazelle, and he compares the lover to a lion going after gazelles for hunting.

<sup>47</sup> The Arabic term *lu'su* لُغْسُ in this verse applied to women or girls who have little blackness in their lips as an indication of their beauty, singular *la'sā'* لعساء, see Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al- 'Arab*, vol. 6 (1992), 207.

The Arabic version in the book by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk reads:<sup>48</sup>

كم في قدود البان تحت اللّم من أقمر عَوَاطِ  
بأنمُلِ وبنان مثل العنَمِ      لم تنبرِ لعَاطِ  
هن الظباء الشمس      قنيصهن الضيغم  
ما إن لها من كُنُس      إلا القلوب الهيم  
القرب منها عُرُس      والبعد عنها مأتم  
تلك الشفاه اللُغُس      يحيى بهنّ المغرم  
لها لحاظ نُغُس      ترنو إلى من يسقم  
بأعين الغزلان وتبتسم      عن جوهر الأسماط  
قضى لها الغيران أن تكتتم      في مُضمَر الأنياط  
أهوى رشاً ساحراً      هواه لي ما أقتله  
قد مسخت طائراً      الحاظه قلبي وله  
ولم يزل سادراً      على هوى ما علله  
لما غدا قادراً      غدا قليل المعدله  
يا حاكماً جابراً      ظلمت من لا ذنب له  
خف سطوة الرحمن إذا حكم بين البري والخاطي

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<sup>48</sup> Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk, *Dār al-ṭirāz*, 60.

The comparison between the two versions of the *muwashshah* reveals a number of exciting findings. First of all, there is a difference between the two versions concerning the order of some parts of the *muwashshah*. While the two start with the same openings, the second part in the *muwashshah* in the fragment comes as the third part in the *muwashshah* found in the book by Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk. The most significant feature in the Judaeo-Arabic version, however, is that it contains a complete part of the *muwashshah* which is missing from the Arabic version (underlined in both transcription and translation). The missing part comes in the second place and starts with (يا من يروم رشدي). As we will also see in other examples, some of the fragments have more verses or parts than what is found in the available Arabic poetry databases.

## 2.6 Religious poetry

Religious Arabic poetry has a place in some fragments in the Cairo Genizah, too. In the fragment T-S Ar.54.31, there are two Arabic poems that were apparently copied from an Islamic source called *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān* – *The death of honourable persons and the frightening of the sons of the epoch* written by the Shāfi'ī Islamic scholar Ibn Khallikān (1211–1282).<sup>49</sup>

The two Arabic poems written by the poet Ibn Wakī' al-Tanīsī (d. 1003) are written in the Arabic poetic metre *al-mutaqārib*:

### **T-S Ar.54.31 (1v)**

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<sup>49</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās and Wadād Qāḍī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1978).

בקדר אלעלו יכון אלהבוט . פאיאך ואלרֶתב

אלעאליה וכֶן פי מכאן אדא מא סקטת תקום

ורגליך פי עאפיה

ולה

לקד רציית המתי באלכמול וחאדת ען

אלרֶתב אלעאליה . ומא גהלת טיב טעם

אלעלא . ולכנהא תותר אלעאפיה

#### Arabic transliteration:

بقدر العلو يكون الهبوط فإياك والرُتب

العالية وكُن في مكان إذا ما سقطت تقوم

ورجليك في عافيه

وله

لقد رضيت همتي بالخمول وحادت عن

الرُتب العالية . وما جهلت طيب طعم

الغلا . ولكنها تؤثر العافيه

#### Translation:

“You will fall with the same speed as you go up. Avoid high

positions and take a place, from which if you fall you

can get up with unharmed legs.

Another poem by him:

My ambition is satisfied by being lazy and avoiding

high positions. It (my ambition) is not unaware of the stunning taste

of the sublime; but rather it prefers safety.”

In the book (*Wafayāt al-a ‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ al-zamān*),<sup>50</sup> these two poems read:

بقدر الصعود يكون الهبوط فإياك والرتب العالية

وكن في مكان إذا ما سقطت تقوم ورجلاك في عافية

And

لقد قنعت همتي بالخمول وصدت عن الرتب العالية

وما جهلت طيب طعم العلا ولكنها تؤثر العافية

The comparison between the Judaeo-Arabic poems in this fragment to the Arabic poems reveals slight differences between the two. First, the grammatical variance between the accusative and nominative cases in *rijlayka* and *rijlāka* (“your legs”) respectively. From a prescriptive grammatical point of view, the case of *rijlāka* is more accurate than *rijlayka*, since *rijlayka* is not in a concomitant object position in the sentence, which has to be an accusative dispensable noun that confirms its companionship, after the particle (و /wāw/) of concomitance (مفعول معه). The *wāw* in the sentence, however, is *wāw al-ḥāl* (the *wāw* of the status), after which comes a

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<sup>50</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a ‘yān*, 105–106.

complete sentence. The noun coming after the sentence in the poem has to be a subject (*mubtada*) in the nominative case. Accordingly, *rijlāka* in the Arabic version of the poem is prescriptively more accurate than the version found in the Judaeo-Arabic fragment.

Another difference between the two versions can be found in some lexical items, like *ḥādat* 'an (departed from) in (Ar.54.31.1v), and *ṣaddat* 'an (hold back from) in the *Wafayāt al-a'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-zamān*.<sup>51</sup> The two verbs are used to give a similar meaning of keeping away from taking high positions.

Another piece of religious poetry reflecting Arabic invocation and prayer to God, written in the Arabic poetic metre *majzū' al-ramal*:

**T-S NS 102.108 (1r):**

יא אלאה אלעאלמין :

יא ולי אלמכרמאת

אנת עפו אלמזנבין :

באלצחא ואדאריאת

ארחם אלכאטי אלחזין :

יום ידני מן לקאך

**Arabic transliteration:**

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<sup>51</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān*, 105.

يا إله العالمين :

يا ولي المكرمات

أنت عفو المذنبين :

بالضحى (وذاريات)

ارحم الخاطي الحزين :

يوم يدني من لقاك

**Translation:**

“Lord of all creation:

The master of generosity

you are the one who forgives the guilty

in the daylight (and at night?).<sup>52</sup>

give your mercy to the mistaken and the sad

when he is about to die (literary: to meet you).”

An example of a very popular Arabic poem used widely in the Islamic world is the poem in T-S

Ar.13.4 by ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (600–660), the cousin of the prophet Muḥammad. It is interesting

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<sup>52</sup> In the Judaeo-Arabic fragment it reads וַאֲדַרְיָאָה. The possible Arabic reading could be *w-al-dariāt*, meaning strong winds. However, the word does not go with the meaning of the verse.

to note that a poem by a famous Islamic figure like ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib was copied into Judaeo-Arabic and read by Jews.

The poem version in the fragment is written in the Arabic poetic metre *al-basīṭ*:

**T-S Ar.13.4 (2r)**

לא תטלם אדא כנת מקתדרא פאלטלם אכרה יאתיך

באלנדמי , תנאם עינאך ועין אלמטלום מנתבהא

ידעו עליך [ך] ועין אללה לם תנמי

**Arabic transliteration:**

لا تظلمن إذا كنت مقتدراً فالظلم آخره يأتيك

بالندم ، تنام عينك وعين المظلوم منتبها

يدعو عليك وعين الله لم تنم

**Translation:**

“Do not oppress when you are able to do so. Oppression brings to you, in the end,

regret. Your eyes fall asleep and the eye of the oppressed stays awake.

He invokes (God) against you, and the Eyes of God never sleep.”

While there is an Arabic version of the poem in which the first verse is equal to the poem in the Judaeo-Arabic fragment,<sup>53</sup> there is another Arabic version of the same poem that reads entirely differently in the second half of the first verse (فَالظُّلْمُ مَرْتَعُهُ يُفْضِي إِلَى النَّدَمِ).<sup>54</sup> However, the version in Arabic sources is slightly better than the version in the Judaeo-Arabic fragment regarding Arabic poetic metre. The poem in the fragment does not follow the proper pattern of the Arabic poetic metre *al-Basīṭ* (the simple) in either the first or second verse in comparison to what appears in the *Diwān* of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib:<sup>55</sup>

لَا تَظْلِمَنَّ إِذَا مَا كُنْتَ مُقْتَدِرًا      فَالظُّلْمُ مَرْتَعُهُ يُفْضِي إِلَى النَّدَمِ  
 تَنَامُ عَيْنُكَ وَالْمَظْلُومُ مُنْتَبِهٌ      يَدْعُو عَلَيْكَ وَعَيْنُ اللَّهِ لَمْ تَنَمْ

Based on the poems discussed above, one can easily say that various genres of Islamic poetry were copied into Judaeo-Arabic sources. This fact confirms that wide-ranging poetic themes were read by Jews during medieval and early modern times.

## 2.7 Poetry for Grammar and eloquence

The collection of Arabic poems preserved in the Cairo Genizah contains a fragment that might be taken from a complete handbook which discusses some Arabic linguistic and rhetorical issues using a poetic text. The poem under discussion is written in a literary style which comes in verses that have one poetic metre. However, each verse follows a different rhyme, unlike the familiar

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<sup>53</sup> Abī l-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *Minhāj al-Yaqīn*, ed. Uways Wafā ibn Muḥammad Khān Zādah (Astana: Maḥmūd Bek Printing, 1910), 40.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *Dīwān Amīr al-Mu‘minīn al-Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Karam (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, 1988), 184.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, *Dīwān Amīr al-Mu‘minīn*, 184.

Arabic poetic style, in which a single poem has one rhyme and one poetic metre for all its verses.

The verses below, written in *al-ragaz* Arabic poetic metre, are taken from a poem which describes the proper Arabic writing style:

**T-S Ar.37.144 (1v)<sup>56</sup>**

**פצל**

**פי מואנע פהם אלמעני מן**

**אללפט**

ואנמא צעובה אלכלאם . יכון מן רדאה אלנטאם

או שדה אלאיגאז ואלתטויל . ולטף מענאה ען אלעקול

או יך מן גראבה אלאלפאט . וכונהא תנבו ען אלחפֿאט.

או כאן לפט סי אלעבארה . או קצר אלרמוז ואלאשארה

**Arabic transliteration:**

**فصل**

**في موانع فهم المعنى من**

**اللفظ**

وإنما صعوبة الكلام . يكون من رداءة النظام

أو شدة الإيجاز والتطويل . ولطف معناه عن العقول

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<sup>56</sup> The title of the poem in the Judaeo-Arabic fragment appears in a larger bold font, highlighted here in bold.

أو يك من غرابة الألفاظ . وكونها تنبو عن الحُفَاطِ  
أو كان لفظ سيء العبارة . أو قصر الرموز والإشاره

**Translation:**

**“Chapter**

**On the stoppages of comprehending the meaning**

**of words**

The unclear discourse is caused by awkward use of prose

Or caused by the extreme shortage or abundance (of words), (that come) with hidden meaning,

Or contain peculiar words, which deviate from the known,

Or have weak expression, limited in notions and reference.”

This poem, along with other examples from the same fragment, constitutes a proof of the unique position of reading poetry among Jews at the time. Even Arabic rhetoric, grammar and eloquence, which are described in poetic style in the fragment, were among the materials that were copied into Judaeo-Arabic.

**3 Poetry written in Arabic script in the Cairo Genizah**

Not all Arabic language poetry found in the Genizah is written in Hebrew script (Judaeo-Arabic), the Collections hold some fragments in Arabic script as well, which may indicate that poetry also circulated in Arabic script in Jewish households.

Among the most important fragments is a small piece of an Arabic fragment written in a beautiful early handwriting. This piece is written on parchment (hence potentially predating the introduction of paper into Egypt) and is part of a very well-known book of Arabic literature, al-‘Iqd al-Farīd (The Unique Necklace), written by the poet and writer Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih (860–940). The fragment T-S Ar.38.3 is a small part left from a severely damaged page. Using Arabic poetry databases, a poem of two verses was first identified. Comparison with the databases showed that the whole piece was taken from the book *al-‘Iqd al-Farīd*.<sup>57</sup> The short poem found in the fragment reads:

### T-S Ar.38.3 (1r)

٣. [ع]نه وقال الشاعر أقول لجاري إذا أتاني مخاصمًا يـ [دُلُّ بحقّ أو يُدِلُّ بباطل] إذا لم يَصِلْ خَيْرِي

٤. [وَأ]نت مجاوري إليك فما شَرِّي إليك بواصل العُثْبِيّ [قال: وَلي عبدُ الله بنُ خالد بن عبد الله القَسْرِي]

٥. [قضاء] البصرة، فكان يُحَابِي أهل مودّتيه؛ فقيل له [أيّ رجلٍ أنت لولا أنك تُحَابِي! قال: وما خَيْر الصّدِيق]

٦. إذا لم يَفْطع لصديقه قِطعة من دينه...

### Translation of the poem (underlined):

“I shall tell my neighbour, if he comes to blame me, whether he is right or wrong: ‘If my welfare did not reach you,

though you are my neighbour, then my harm will not reach you either.’”

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<sup>57</sup> Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *Kitāb al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qumīḥa (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, 1984), II: 207.

The fragment T-S Ar.30.6 holds another poem preserved in Arabic script. The love poem is written in cursive handwriting and comes in three verses. On the same page of the fragment, there are two lines, apparently from another Arabic poem, written in Hebrew script. The poem belongs to the Abbasid poet al-Wazīr al-Muhallabī (903–963), who composed it in Arabic poetic metre *al-kāmil*.

**T-S Ar.30.6 (1v):**

حوت

[ما] ان هممت بوصل غيري مره الا بللت من الدموع جيوبا

[وظل]لت في غمرات حبك ساهما حتى ليحسبني الجليس مريبا

[إني ليم]نعني هواك عن الهوا حتى كأن علي (منك) رقبيا

**Translation:**

“It contains

Once you turned to someone else, I made my collar wet with tears.

I remained unconscious in the deluge of your love, so that people sitting nearby thought that I was suspicious.

Your passion prevents me from (finding another) love, as if there is an observer (hired by you) who watches me.”

This poem is found in the Arabic poetry databases. However, it reads differently from the version in the fragment.<sup>58</sup>

|                               |                             |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| إني ليعصمني هواك عن الهوى     | حتى كأن علي منك رقيباً      |
| وأجول في غمرات حبك جاهداً     | طوراً فيحسبني الجليس رهيباً |
| ما إن هممتُ بشمّ نحرِكِ ساعةً | إلا ملأت من الدموع جيوباً   |

**Translation:**

“Your passion prevents me from finding another love, as if there is an observer (hired by you) watching me.

I wander through the deluge of your love fervently, in a way that people sitting nearby think that I am terrifying.

Once I start smelling your neck, I make my collar wet with tears.”

The comparison between the two versions, although both are written in Arabic script, reveals some differences. The first point is related to verse order; the first verse in the Cairo Genizah fragment comes as the last verse in the Arabic version in the book *Mu‘jam al-‘Udabā’* (the writers’ lexicon),<sup>59</sup> and vice versa. The second variation is located in the first half of the first verse in the fragment (ما إن هممت بوصل غيري مره), which is written as (ما إن هممتُ بشمّ نحرِكِ ساعةً) in *Mu‘jam al-‘Udabā’*. There are also some other differences between the two versions in terms

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<sup>58</sup> Yāqūt ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-‘Udabā’*: *Irshād al-arīb ilā ma‘rifat al-adīb*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), III: 992.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-‘Udabā’*, III: 992.

of words. For instance, the words (مريباً، طوراً، ليعصمني) in the fragment, which appear as ( رهيياً، )  
(حتى، ليمنعني) in the book *Mu`jam al-`Udabā`* respectively.

The recto of the fragment T-S Ar.30.6 contains an Arabic poem written in Hebrew script.

The poem in the fragment belongs to a well-known Abbasid poet called Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī (932–967). The theme of the poem is love, and it is written in Arabic poetic metre *al-bāsīṭ*:

### T-S Ar.30.6 (1r)

غيره حوت

[ס]כרת מן לחצה לא מן מדאמתה ומאל באלנום ען עי[בי]

תמאילה

ומא אלסל[אף] [..] בל סואלפה ולא אלשמול בלאני ב[ל]

שמאילה

אלוא בעזמי אצדאג לויי לה וגאל צברי מא תחוי

גלאילה

### Transliteration:

غيره حوت

[ס]כרת מן לחظه לא מן מדאמתה ומאל באלנום ען עיני

תמאילה

ומא אלסל[אף] [..] בל סואלפה ולא אלשמול בלאני ב[ל]

שמאילה

ألوا بعزمي أصداع لويي له وغال صبري ما تحوي

غلائله

**Translation:**

“another poem, contains:

I was made drunk by seeing her, not by (drinking) her wine. Her dance took the sleep away from

my eyes

It was she, not the wine, that made me crazy. It was her charisma, not the cold wine, that

afflicted me.

My power was ruined by my cheeks, which are submitted to her. She stole my heart, so it (my

heart) is free from

betrayal.”

The version of the Arabic poem in Arabic books is quite the same as in the JA version, there is

only one difference between the two versions, which is the verb (إزدهنتي – belittled me) and the

verb (بلاني – afflicted me):<sup>60</sup>

وَمَالَ بِالنَّوْمِ عَنِ عَيْنِي تَمَائِلُهُ

سَكِرْتُ مِنْ لِحْظِهِ لَا مِنْ مُدَامَتِهِ

وَلَا الشُّمُولُ إِزْدَهَنْتِي بَلْ شَمَائِلُهُ

وَمَا السُّلَافُ دَهَنْتِي بَلْ سَوَالِفُهُ

وَوَالِ صَبْرِي مَا تَحْوِي غَلَائِلُهُ

أَلْوَى بَعَزْمِي أَصْدَاعُ لُؤْيِنَ لَهُ

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<sup>60</sup> Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī, *Sharḥ Dīwān Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī*, ed. Khalīl Al-Diwāhī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-‘arabī, 1994), 260.

The poem in Hebrew script is headed by Arabic script words (غيره حوت), meaning “another poem contains”. It is interesting to note that the Arabic handwriting of this word is very similar to the poem written in Arabic script in the verso of the same fragment. Apparently, the same scribe wrote both the Judaeo-Arabic and Arabic poems in this fragment, which raises some questions concerning the context: Why would a Jewish scribe write Arabic poetry in both Arabic and Hebrew script in a single document? Has this anything to do with the audience? And for what purpose would the lines have both Arabic and Hebrew script interchangeably? More research is required to reveal the reasons behind this phenomenon.

#### **4 The Cairo Genizah and the study of Arabic literature.**

The Cairo Genizah has preserved thousands of fragments that have completely changed scholarly understanding of Jewish culture and history in the Middle East from the medieval period until modern times. The importance of Genizah sources for Arabic Studies is now increasingly appreciated by scholars, and the poems discussed in this paper reveal illuminating examples of Abbasid, Fatimid and Ottoman Arabic poetry preserved in the Collections.

The comparison between Arabic poems in the Judaeo-Arabic fragments and the poems found in Arabic poetry databases shows, many times, differences between the two. These variations occur mostly at the lexical level, mainly of synonyms of Arabic terms. Another notable variation can be found in the way that verse order was different in a single poem between the two sources.

The most significant feature of the Cairo Genizah fragments in this paper, however, is that some fragments have extra verses, or sometimes parts in the case of *muwashshah*, that are missing from Arabic poetry databases.

To give an example, the fragment T-S Ar.37.127 holds a poem that might belong to an Abbasid-period poet called Khālid al-Kātib (d.876), who was famous for his romantic Arabic poetry. The poem starts with two verses, which are almost the same as Khālid al-Kātib's poem available in his *Dīwān*.<sup>61</sup> However, the rest of the poem in the fragment is different from the Arabic version 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 metre and rhythm, though, are the same in the two versions, which are written in the Arabic poetic metre *majzū' al-ramal*:

### 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

(1r)

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<sup>61</sup> Khālid al-Kātib, *Dīwān Khālid al-Kātib*, ed. Karin Sadir (Aleppo: Publications of Syrian Ministry of Culture, 2006), 399.

كلما اشتد خضوعي الذي بين ضلوعي

(1v)

في دمنة الخد خيول من دموعي لا تلمنا

إذ بكينا وهممنا بالرجوع كلما أ

أبصرت ربعاً دارساً فاضت دموعي

**Translation:**

“Every time my submission increases, the submission which is between my ribs,

horses of my tears<sup>62</sup> are in the ground of my cheek. Do not blame us

if we cry and intend to return. Every time

I see an effaced house my tears flow”.

Whereas the version found in the *Dīwān* by Ḳālid al-Kātib reads:<sup>63</sup>

كلما اشتد خضوعي      لجوي بين ضلوعي

رَكَضَتْ فِي حَلْبَتِي خُدي      خيل من دموعي

“Every time my submission increases, because of the love between my ribs,

horses of my tears run in the racecourse of my cheek”.

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<sup>62</sup> The poet compares between the tears and the horses. Like horses, tears run in the ground of his cheek.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Kātib, *Dīwān Khālid al-Kātib*, 399.

The oldest Arabic manuscript we have of the *Diwān* by Khālīd al-Kātib is a copy dated to the year 1698.<sup>64</sup> 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 thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. This suggests that the poem found in the fragment could be the oldest extant version of the Arabic poem written by the Abbasid-poet Khālīd al-Kātib. This is not the only case in which Judaeo-Arabic poems found in the Genizah fragments differ from the Arabic poems available in Arabic poetry databases. The poems discussed above in this paper show that other fragments in the Cairo Genizah Collections reveal the same phenomena.<sup>65</sup>

This article highlights, albeit briefly, the diversity of themes and genres of Arabic poetry read by Jews in medieval and early modern Egypt. A random survey of Genizah fragments showed poems mainly written in Hebrew script (that is, in Judaeo-Arabic) and fewer written in Arabic script. The topics are varied, including secular and religious poetry, although love poetry is the dominant theme. The most important feature of the Cairo Genizah poetry presented here is verses, even complete parts, of famous poems which have only been preserved in Judaeo-Arabic fragments. The findings also suggest that the Genizah has preserved some Arabic poems in versions that are several hundred years older than the extant manuscripts from other collections and, therefore, demonstrates how useful and vital the Cairo Genizah could be for the recovery of lost works, or of more original versions.

This paper, however, does not claim that the Judaeo-Arabic fragments provide the more correct versions of the Arabic poems in comparison to existing Arabic poetry sources. Nor does it

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<sup>64</sup> Al-Kātib, *Dīwān Khālīd al-Kātib*, 40–41.

<sup>65</sup> See for instance the *muwashshah* section in this paper.

underestimate the quality of the Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah because of the minor “mistakes” (according to prescriptive grammar) in terms of grammar and Arabic poetic metres in some of the poems discussed above. It does, however, emphasise the importance of the Cairo Genizah as a prospective contributor to and an abundant source for the diachronic and historical study of Arabic literature and Arabic poetry, and stresses the need for further studies of Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah.

Having often been written in Hebrew script and having been kept in the Genizah, the Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah also evokes some broader questions: for what purposes were these Judaeo-Arabic copies produced? The fact they were written in Judaeo-Arabic means that Arabic poetry in Hebrew script was being circulated among Jews. The question is for what kind of readership? Were the readers the educated Jewish elite, themselves poets, who were reading them in order to acquire knowledge for their poetic works? If so, why did this elite not read them in Arabic script, or why did they prefer to read them in Hebrew script? If the use of script had to do with education, was it actually the educated middle classes, like merchants, for whose pleasure these manuscripts were produced? Were the fragments part of a project to copy popular Arabic books about literature and poetry into Judaeo-Arabic, like the Karaite scribes who copied a number of Arabic Sufi books into Judaeo-Arabic? The study of Arabic poetry in the Cairo Genizah arouses thought-provoking questions, and therefore, suggests possible new and illuminating avenues of inquiry.