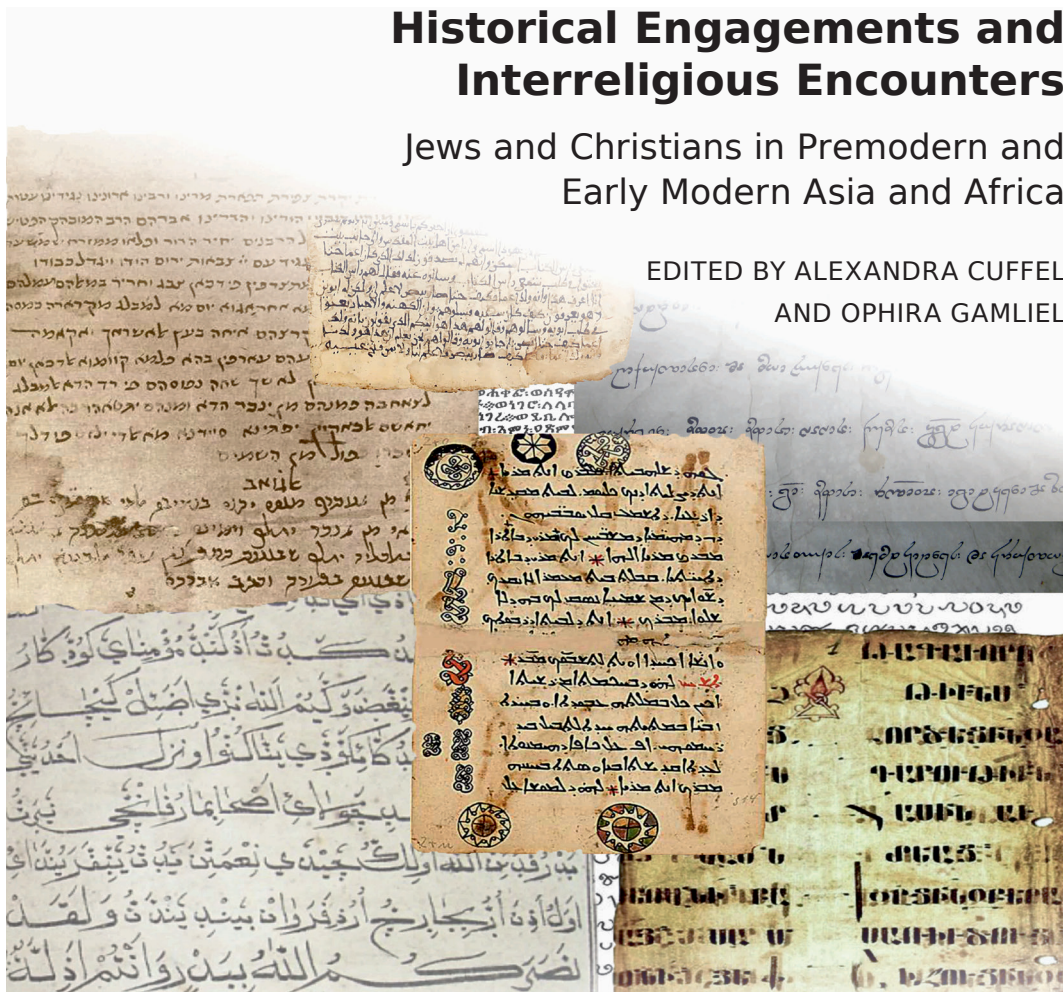# Historical Engagements and Interreligious Encounters

Jews and Christians in Premodern and Early Modern Asia and Africa

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Historical Engagements and Interreligious Encounters

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Entangled Histories and Interreligious Encounters

Jews and Christians in Premodern and Early Modern Asia and Africa

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Scholars examining pre-modern Jewish encounters with non-Jewish communities have increasingly emphasized the multiple and complex dimensions of these interactions within the same or connected cultural milieux. Ritual and legal practices, religious concepts, artistic motifs, and forms of material culture, economic and other quotidian exchanges, and of course polemical treatises, exegesis, and literary representations have all captured researchers' attention (Baumgarten, Karras, and Medler 2017; Secunda 2013; Bonfil, Irshai, and Talgam 2012; Simonsohn 2011; Shalev-Eyni 2010; Gaudette 2010; Holo 2009; Kogman-Appel and Meyer 2008; Cuffel 2007; Becker and Reed 2007; Meri 2002). With regard to the pre-modern Islamic world, scholars have regularly noted the parallel experiences and status of Jews and Christians under Islamic rule, as well as shared cultural practices between Muslims and *dhimmi* communities (Russ-Fishbane 2015; Safran 2011; Mayeur-Jaouen 2005; Meri 1999; Fenton 1995, 1997, 2000; Cohen 1994). Despite the shared social and cultural history of Jews and Christians as *dhimmi*s all through the world of Islam prior to the nineteenth century, their intercommunal relations and attitudes to each other receive little attention and only in passing.

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The essays in this special issue of *Entangled Religions* are based on the proceedings of the workshop *Eastern Jews and Christians in Interaction and Exchange in the Islamic World and Beyond: A Comparative View* held in Jerusalem and Raʿanana in June 2016. Accordingly, the essays address interreligious encounters in the Islamic world and beyond, examining social and religious attitudes towards religious Others in a wide range of disciplinary approaches. What binds these essays together is an attempt to shed light on a little-known history of Jewish-Christian relations in premodern Asia and Africa, a subject that stands at the heart of the research project *Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies and Interactions between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean* funded by the European Research Council and hosted by the Center for Religious Studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. In many respects, this publication is the first attempt to approach the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the premodern Muslim world and beyond it to regions where the history of these communities is largely unrecorded, such as Ethiopia, and Central and South Asia.

A word on periodization is in place. Some scholars have noted that "medieval" is a Eurocentric term that is problematic or inaccurate when applied to other civilizations, and in particular to the Islamic world and to South Asia (Hodgson 1974, 2, 3–11; Berkey 2003, 179; Veluthat 2009, 19–60). We therefore use the term "premodern" wherever further specification is not required, and not to the exclusion of the early modern period (sixteenth century) or late antiquity (eighth-tenth centuries). The term "medieval" is used wherever the period in the region under investigation parallels that which is understood by the term in the European context. The reason for this rather lax periodization is the highly diversified nature of the sources and the communities under investigation.

Indeed, the extent and character of sources attesting to Jewish-Christian relations in premodern Africa and Asia changes from region to

region. Thus, in this special issue of *Entangled Religions* dealing with a wide range of regions and languages, each article represents a different type of source material related directly or obliquely to premodern Jews and Christians imagining each other, imagined by others, or in actuality sharing a sociocultural history. The first article in this collection, by Giuseppe Cecere, deals with Christians and Jews as the Other projected in Muslim imagination and aspiration for religious subjugation. Similarly, the articles by Mordechai Dubovick and Michal Ohana deal with Christians as a constructed Other in Jewish literature, mainly of hermeneutic genres building upon historic layers of Jewish Biblical commentaries. Ofir Haim and Sophia Dege-Müller deal with a slightly different mode of Othering, where Christians and Jews, respectively, are clustered along various types of Others by labelling and stereotyping. Finally, Ophira Gamliel and Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs deal with Jewish history in South India and Jewish material culture in Ethiopia, respectively, where the relations with and to Christians can merely and obliquely be inferred against the backdrop of the actual historical consequences. To write a comprehensive history of Jewish-Christian relations in the regions where co-existence or contacts—even if only imagined—left some form of traces, a novel approach to historical sources is required. The essays presented here deal with various types of source material that is potentially useful in writing a comprehensive history of Jewish-Christian relations even in regions and periods that lack concrete historical evidence. Each of the essays demonstrates an innovative approach to sources that were not yet utilized in a comprehensive historical investigation of Eastern Jewish-Christian relations. It should be noted that the miscellaneous section appended to this collection contains an outline by Barbara Roggema of the planned publication of a three-volume survey of sources to be implemented in writing the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the Eastern Mediterranean, North and Northeast Africa, and

Central, West, and South Asia. In many respects, the papers in this online publication are based on the identification of sources and their utilization in writing parts of a history that is yet to be written.

We start with Giuseppe Cecere's survey of the Egyptian hagiographies of Sufi saints, an excellent example of approaching the social history of Jews and Christians through the prism of Muslim attitudes. He observes the changing attitudes toward Christians and Jews in these hagiographies, in particular of the Shādhiliyya order, noting that the most common point of reference is to the miraculous power (*karāmāt*) of a Shaykh. Cecere traces patterns in the treatment of Christians and Jews in the *karāmāt* narratives, the most common being the transformation of the Other into a faithful Muslim. He devotes much of his article to references which deviate from this pattern of conversion, however. He examines in detail attitudes ranging from tolerating the Other, as in the case of the Jewish physician licensed to practice medicine by the power of al-Shādhilī, to oppressing the Other even against the will of the ruler. An example of the latter is the case of Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl demanding the removal of the Coptic Church in Fusṭāṭ.

Cecere begins his article by cautioning against facile dichotomies of Sufi tolerance toward *dhimmi*s and other non-Muslims too often contrasted against Muslim legal or administrative religious intolerance. He notes at the outset the long tradition of Sufi involvement with military Jihād, including debates in Mamluk Egypt and regardless of the position of the antagonist Christians, i.e. whether they surrendered willingly to Muslims or had fought against them. These traditions and debates, along with anxiety about Coptic administrators and "Franks" (European Christians), substantively affected Sufi depictions of Christian and Jewish communities, and, according to Cecere, they are also reflected in the history of Sufi actual interactions with Christians and Jews. Cecere underscores in his article the exceptions to the most common patterns of Sufi attitudes to non-Muslims

as expressed in the *karāmāt* narratives, demonstrating that these models were not immutable. Insofar as such narratives were affected not merely by hagiographic convention, but also by an individual author's choice, the politics and anxieties of a given region and period, and the experiences of quotidian interactions between religious groups, Sufi hagiographies remain an essential source for understanding the often delicate balance between majority and minority communities in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt. Cecere thus utilizes the Sufi hagiography as a source for the historiography of interreligious relations. It is precisely this culturally sensitive approach to sources dismissed as fictional or mythical by conventional historians that enables the writing of the history of interreligious relations where documents are scarce or, at times, even non-existent.

A relatively neglected area of study in the field of interreligious relations within the Islamicate world is the relations *between* religious minorities. Broadly speaking, this would encompass Jewish-Christian relations in much of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as Zoroastrian-Christian-Jewish relations in the Abbasid, Seljuq, and Safavid Iran and surrounding territories. The concept of minorities relies on varied defining factors, not necessarily religion-oriented, and depends on the regions and their specific sociopolitical context. Studies on religious minorities in Egypt from the Fatimid through the Mamluk periods attribute this category to communities depraved of power regardless of their relative population size.[1] Most studies of religious interactions in these areas concentrate on minority groups

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1   See for example the discussions on the slow process of Islamicization of Egypt, where the numerical majority remained primarily Christian during the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and possibly even the Mamluk period (Werthmuller 2010, 74–76; Brett 2005; Garcin 1987). For a systematic discussion of the discrepancy between these two meanings of "minority" and their socio-political and religious meanings, see Boisellier, Clément, and Tolan 2010. For an attempt to define minority in universal terms beyond the context of the medieval Mediterranean, see Skutsch 2005, xxiii–xxiv.

in relation to the ruling Muslims (Peacock, de Nicola, and Yildiz, 2015; Elverskog 2010; Winkler 2010; Griffith 2008; Choksy 1997). Importantly, the relations between Jews and Christians outside the European context were modelled in various ways which were not always determined by Muslim domination, as in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. For example, in South Asia Jewish and Christian individuals and communities are hardly visible before the colonial period, though their presence in the region is attested since the ninth century (Narayanan 1972, 2004; Varier and Veluthat 2013; Gamliel 2018). In early-modern Moghul India Jews surface as a sort of curiosity to be entertained at Akbar's court whereas Christians act as missionaries (Fischel 1948-1949; Katz 2000). In the latter case Jews and Christians are marked "outsiders", as opposed to the situation on the Malabar Coast in western South India. Our main concern is with Jewish and Christian communities whose history predates the colonial period which is considered integral to the Asian or African region under investigation.

Clearly, the study of inter-minority relations is more readily approachable within the framework of the history of the majority or dominant group and requires a nuanced reexamination of sources with the intent of deciphering the implications of majority-minority interactions on relations between minorities. Thus, for example, when Uriel Simonsohn (2011) investigates the legal boundaries between religious communities during the Early Islamic period, his work points at social similarities between Jewish and Christian minorities even if it does not directly address the relations between Jews and Christians. Intra-minority relations between groups belonging to a broad confessional division have garnered slightly more attention, such as the relations between Rabbanite and Karaite Jews (Zinger 2017; Bohak 2013; Rustow 2011; Frank 2008) or interactions between different Christian communities (Pogossian 2016; Farag 2011; Weltecke 2003).

There are important exceptions to these general remarks. Focusing on Jewish-Christian interactions under Islamic rule or influenced by it, scholars have increasingly remarked upon evidence from the Cairo Geniza that Jews collected Christian literature and seem to have been familiar with and interested in Christian languages and alphabets (Russell 2013; Szilágyi 2005; Brock 1984, 1990). Other types of cross-fertilization between Jewish and Christian communities have also captured sporadic scholarly attention, producing excellent studies on individual examples of this phenomenon in polemical, philosophical, and apocalyptic literatures.[2] Despite these efforts, detailed, systematic studies of the history of Jewish-Christian connections—whether friendly or hostile—in the Eastern Mediterranean from the rise of Islam through the sixteenth century and in the relevant Asian and African regions have remained few in comparison to the level of scholarship for Western Europe and Byzantium. The aim of this special volume and of the joint workshop from which it sprang is to rectify this imbalance in the scholarship.

Three of the articles in this special edition of *Entangled Religions* explore textual evidence for Jewish-Christian encounters in the Eastern Mediterranean (Dubovick), North Africa (Ohana), and Central Asia (Haim). These three articles deal directly with the attitudes of Jews toward Christians, providing a glance into sociocultural overlaps unmitigated by the Muslim majority and its political dominance. The intertextual connections between Jews and Christians in eleventh-century Baghdad are explicated by Mordechai Yosaif Dubovick in his discussion of the arguments posed by R. Hayya Ga'on, head of the Pumbadithan Academy, to ward off the reluctance of the Sicilian R. Maṣliaḥ in consulting the Patriarch of the Church of the East

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2   For apocalyptic texts, see Pogossian forthcoming; Greisiger 2014, 2008. For polemic texts, see Roggema 2009; Pines 1967. For philosophical material, see Schwarb 2014; Stroumsa 1991.

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(Nestorian) in Baghdad on the definition of a word in Psalms 141:5. Using different accounts of the same event, Dubovick examines the attitude of the Sicilian rabbi to sharing textual traditions with Christian authorities and contrasts it with that of the Rabbi of Baghdad as reflecting two different contexts of co-existence, or of inter-religious relations. Regarding the two contrasted "contact zones", so to speak (Pratt 1991), Dubovick suggests that relations between Jews and Christians, specifically those of the Church of the East in Baghdad were closer, perhaps even warmer, than those extant in Sicily, where a largely Byzantine Orthodox population and the proximity to Catholic Rome prevented the cosmopolitan atmosphere that was typical of Baghdad at the time. This observation is an important one, for it highlights the context-bound nature of religious encounters between Christian and Jewish communities. Dubovick demonstrates that Jewish and Christian communities were not monolithic across regions and unconditioned by sociopolitical context; various Christian and Jewish communities may have had strikingly different attitudes toward and relations with each other. Clearly, the nature of Jewish-Christian relations is not interchangeable from one context to another.

Dubovick's main focus is on the competing textual layers of Biblical exegesis and translations of the verse in both Jewish and Christian traditions. He suggests that it was not the religious authority *per se* which prompted the Ga'on to seek the advice of the Patriarch, but rather the fact that he attributed the Patriarch with access to the Peshitta's Syriac during a time when many Christians were gradually losing their command of Syriac in favor of Arabic. In one version of the events, the Patriarch's reply closely resembles the Masoretic reading, which Dubovick attributes to a connection between Christian-Syriac and Jewish-Aramaic early reading traditions and interpretations of the Biblical text. This intertextual analysis of the hermeneutic history of Psalms 141:5 and the anecdotal incident

of R. Maṣliaḥ's scholarly embassy are depictive of intra-Jewish debates concerning the shared textual history with Syriac Christians and reveal the different attitudes of Jewish communities toward Christian scholarly authority.

That real-life encounters were shaped into religious and scholarly discourse is demonstrated by Michal Ohana in her examination of anti-Christian Jewish polemics in R. Shaul Serero's sermons against the backdrop of developments in the history of the community in Fes. Of the three sermons discussed in her article, one is suggested by Ohana to be based on an actual debate, whereas the other two are based on theoretical and theological anti-Christian polemic. Ohana traces Serero's religious position to two historical events that shaped Serero's anti-Christian arguments; one is the expulsion of his ancestors from Spain a century earlier, and the other is the defeat of King Sebastian of Portugal in Morocco in 1578, resulting in the capture of Portuguese soldiers. The Portuguese captives were placed in the Jewish quarter for care. This latter event left a local legacy of interfaith contacts and at least one actual debate, which was recorded in a Portuguese account and which shaped Serero's sermons two decades later. According to Ohana, Serero's arguments in his first sermon (1603) were aimed at a Jewish apostate he claimed to have met, although the debate drew from a long tradition of Jewish-Christian polemics.

Serero lived in a region hosting diverse ethnic and religious groups in times of change affecting intra-communal tensions among religious groups—Moroccan Jews and Sephardim, Christians and New Christians, Muslim rulers and warriors. Right at the outset Ohana notes that although Jews in Islamic countries were not as threatened by Christian dominance as in Europe, their cosmopolitan environment exposed them to missionary activities which in turn engaged them in anti-Christian polemical discourse. Serero, while relying on a long tradition of Jewish polemics, shaped his anti-

Christian arguments to fit his own time and place and to address the need to confront missionizing activities in his own community. Ohana's article, like that of Dubovick, shows that under Islamic hegemony Jewish-Christian encounters—whether historical or discursive—acquire a more sporadic character in comparison with Latin Europe, where polemic literature became a fully-fledged genre of Jewish literature.

Further into the Persianate World, Ofir Haim examines Biblical exegesis for its interreligious references, though in this case the references to the Other are generic rather than interpersonal or scholarly. Looking at a corpus of early Judeo-Persian Biblical commentaries, Haim notes that this corpus generally lacks polemical references, except in sections dealing with the prophetess Ḥannah. In the commentaries on Ḥannah's story (1 Samuel, 1:11–2:10), Christians and Muslims appear under the prototypical designations ʾEdom and Išmaʿel, respectively, as entities that affiliate, albeit erring in their understanding, with the Biblical prophets. These are contrasted with "philosophers and astronomers", or those who reject prophecy altogether in favor of rationality. Whereas the former are presented as resorting to false prophets (Jesus and Muhammad respectively), the latter are presented as the radical Other in their adherence to "foreign sciences". The Jewish authors reject the intellectual inquiry of the "astronomers and philosophers" as unthinkable heresy, while discussing the fate of Christians and Muslims at the moment of salvation.

Haim unravels this commentary's intersections with both Rabbanite and Karaite hermeneutic traditions, although the degree to which the Judeo-Persian author was directly familiar with Judeo-Arabic exegetical traditions remains uncertain. He points out that a closer examination of the corpus as a whole and its intersecting Rabbanite and Karaite references would reveal much about the literary and religious world of the Judeo-Persian audience of the texts. The commentary about Ḥannah calls for a

deeper analysis of intra-religious relations between communities of Jews in the Islamicate world. The generic references which Haim traces therein are comparable to rhetorical devices in Christian texts, where Jews are clustered with other religious "undesirables" such as heretics, Muslims, and Pagans (Lipton 1999, 30–53, 82–111; Dege-Müller, this volume). Tactical commonalities across geographical and cultural distances raise questions about the portability of polemical strategies, or alternately about their ubiquity, not necessarily as an outcome of historical contacts.

The case studies discussed by Dubovick, Ohana and Haim do attest, however, to historical contacts between Jews hailing from distant regions. When dealing with relations between Eastern Jews and Christians it becomes clear that their communities are all located along the routes and around the nodes of the historical trade networks between the Eastern Mediterranean and East Asia, encircling the inland trade routes via Central Asia to the north and the Indian Ocean maritime trade routes to the South. Religious communities came into contact through interactions in economic activities all throughout the Mediterranean and along international trade routes through land via the so-called Silk Road and by sea via the Indian Ocean. For this reason, the interreligious relations between these minority communities can be conveniently studied under the framework of trading diasporas, or trading communities, thus calling for a transregional perspective beyond the examination of strictly-defined regional contexts (Subrahmanyam 1997; Seland 2013).

The interconnectedness of cultures over supra-regional landscapes was first modelled for the Mediterranean by Fernand Braudel (1972–1973; see also Goitein 1967–1993; Abulafia 2011; Harris 2005; Horden and Purcell 2000). A model similar to that of Braudel's Mediterranean model was developed for the Indian Ocean Rim embracing the coastal regions connected via the seas from Southwest Asia and East Africa to South and

Southeast Asia (Alpers 2014; Sheriff and Ho 2014; Pearson 2003; Chaudhuri 1985, 1990). Both the fields of Mediterranean and Indian Ocean Studies are interdisciplinary in terms of combining disparate area studies and related subjects such as language, culture, and history. In both fields, the notions of trading networks across regions and over the *longue durée* acquired a prominent place in developing the paradigm further to also incorporate cultural and religious studies into the examination of interconnectedness and exchange on the supra-regional level. The history of Eastern Jewish-Christian relations is, to a large extent, embedded in the history of long-distance trade networks prior to the advent of European colonialism.

Trade in the Indian Ocean forms the subject matter of studies on economic and sea-faring activities that are traceable in history since the first millennium BCE, with textual and material evidence becoming more and more abundant as the Arab-Muslim networks gradually expand across the Indian Ocean Rim (Tibbetts 1971; Chaudhuri 1990; Hourani 1995; Wink 1990–2004; Gupta 2005; Gurukkal 2016). The trade networks of West Asians on the one hand and South Asians on the other hand have been the focus of studies based on textual and inscriptional evidence (Abraham 1988; Champakalakshmi 2001; Subbarayalu 2009). The history of Indian Ocean maritime trade involves immaterial types of exchange besides the exchange of commodities, finance, and travel technology. Intellectual, cultural, and religious contacts, too, were instrumental—rather than merely consequential—in the expansion of the transregional networks of maritime trade communities. Especially significant in the context of Jewish-Christian relations are those types of exchange related to religious practices and ideologies (Risso 1995; Ricci 2010; Lambourn 2008; Malekkandathil 2010; Kooria 2016).

The discovery of the Cairo Geniza revealed hundreds of documents related to Jewish maritime trade networks in the Indian Ocean from

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the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. These documents constitute a historical source of unique quality which is often related to as documentary Geniza in the sense that the texts offer a glimpse into real-life events in Indian Ocean history that would have otherwise been left in the dark (Margariti 2007, 2014; Goitein and Friedman 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, with Ashur 2013). Within this body of research, the West Coast of South India has long been recognized as an important point of convergence, trade, and interreligious encounters, yet the disciplinary barriers between South Asian and Mediterranean Studies remain largely unbreachable, notwithstanding several attempts towards a holistic approach to the connected history of the western and eastern shores of the Arabian Sea (Shokoohy 2013; Lambourn 2016, forthcoming; Kooria 2016; Gamliel forthcoming).

The article by Ophira Gamliel attempts an interdisciplinary study of intermarriage as instrumental in networking between Aden and the Malabar Coast. She bases her study on Geniza documents left by the Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yijū, whose life story as reconstructed by Geniza fragments captured the imagination of scholars (Goitein 1973; Ghosh 2002). Gamliel compares laws and customs of marriage, conversion, slavery, and inheritance in Jewish lore with the socioeconomic status of Ben Yijū's wife, Aśu, and business associates in South India. She addresses certain discrepancies in the depiction of Aśu as a slave girl in a deed of manumission on the one hand, and of one Nāyar as the brother-in-law of her husband, Ben Yijū. She argues that Ben Yijū's definition of Aśu as a convert slave girl follows the strategies laid out by Jews who married (and proselytized) Christian concubines, and compares these strategies with Muslim customs of temporary marriage. Her article outlines a complex networking strategy of adaption and negotiation between South Indian and Mediterranean kinship structures navigated by Abraham Ben Yijū. Besides attempting a balanced study of evidence from both sides of the

Arabian Sea, her study presents a multidisciplinary approach to the study of sources combining socioeconomic history with historical linguistics. It further signals a new direction for the exploration of medieval Jewish Indian Ocean traders in integrating the study of Cairo Geniza documents with that of South Indian social history.

The study of the Jewish maritime networks in the Indian Ocean surprisingly falls short of references to Christian merchants, who left hardly any traces in the history of medieval Indian Ocean trade despite their documented involvement in long-distance trade during the centuries preceding the rise of Islam (Seland 2012). Even though we can speculate that Malabar Christian communities emerged in a similar way to that of Muslims and Jews, namely through a gradual process of integration and assimilation of itinerant West Asian traders, the evidence for real-life encounters and contacts with Muslim and Jewish Indian Ocean merchants, let alone with South Indian communities, is close to none. This lack of evidence becomes even more striking when considering the Christian history of Ethiopia on the western shores on the Red Sea, which was the major maritime pathway leading from the Eastern Mediterranean towards the regions lying across the Indian Ocean Rim (Power 2012; Pankurst 2003).

Ethiopia's history of interreligious encounters and cross-cultural exchanges from late antiquity to the early modern period is a rich and complex one. Much of the scholarship in this area has focused on Ethiopia's involvement with interreligious politics in pre-Islamic Arabia or Rome, or on diplomatic and artistic exchanges with medieval Western Europe, although its relations with India have also been touched upon (Krebs 2014; Hatke 2011, 2013; Bowerstock 2013; Fiey 2010; Ranasignhe 2001; Beckingham 1989, 1994; Tamrat 1972; Shahid 1971; Abir, 1980). European expansion into the region has likewise generated analyses of religious encounter between European and Ethiopian Christians as well as Muslims (Knobler

2017, 30–43, 49–56; Belcher and Kleiner 2015; Pennec 2003; Shabot 2001; Aubin 1980; Lesure 1976). Most scholars working on religious history within premodern Ethiopia in detail, however, have tended to focus on a single religious community, although the historiography regarding the Beta Israel or "Fälaša" forms a significant exception to this tendency (Derat 2003; Kaplan 1984; Trimmingham 1969). Therefore the two articles by Sophia Dege-Müller and by Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs, followed by the response of Steven Kaplan, form a significant contribution to the study of interreligious relations in medieval Ethiopia.

Dege-Müller examines the attitudes and rhetorical strategies of Christian elites in Ethiopia toward Jews, contrasting the periods prior to and following the fourteenth century, when an actual, historical community, identified by itself and by outsiders as Jewish, surfaces in written sources. Her article deals also with Ethiopian relations with Greek and Arab Christian societies and contextualizes interreligious encounters in internal political developments. The translation and adaptation of Greek and Arabic anti-Jewish sources into Geʿez reveal a history of cross-cultural exchange between Ethiopia and the Mediterranean and Arab worlds. Furthermore, the material and polemical tactics which Dege-Müller analyzes place the history of Ethiopian Jewish-Christian relations within a connected continuum of polemical discourse which existed between medieval Jews and Christians in the surrounding regions. At the same time, her article shows that despite the connected history on the supra-regional level, Ethiopia's history of interreligious encounters has its own unique features, which Dege-Müller attributes to a pendulum movement between positive and negative representations of Jews. The former is usually associated with an imagined Israelite or Hebrew identity. She emphasizes the stark distinction between the written historical legacy of Ethiopian Christians as opposed to the oral tradition of Ethiopian Jews, a marginalized and discriminated group. The

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negative portrayals of Ethiopian Jews, at times also implemented on other marginalized non-Jewish communities (such as the degraded Stephanites), are not only analyzed in her article but also presented in an appended list of translations and texts from the relevant sources, which will surely enrich future studies in the field.

As Dege-Müller shows, the perspective of Beta Israel (Ethiopian) Jews is difficult to obtain from historical sources. The efforts of Bar Kribus and Verena Krebs to unearth Beta Israel historical relations to Christians represent a novel approach of combining archaeology and ethnography in order to shed light on this issue otherwise left invisible. Kribus' research on Ethiopian Jewish monasticism as a *sui generis* phenomenon in the Jewish world is germane to the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the Ethiopian highlands, as it opens up a new set of questions related to interreligious exchange of shared perceptions of sacred spaces and holy men. Kribus' research expedition with Krebs, an art historian, is a unique quest for nearly-forgotten settlements of Jewish craftsmen and holy men that are still visible in the landscape once inhabited by Beta Israel communities. Their success in identifying Jewish monastic sites brings into clear relief the benefit of combining textual sources with oral and material sources for historical research on Jewish-Christian relations in Ethiopia.

Kribus and Krebs' treatment of material evidence is especially innovative, as it brings to the foreground the artisanal activities of the Beta Israel, an aspect hardly, if at all, visible in textual sources. The detailing of the structure and shape of the sacred spaces of the Beta Israel, left from recent times, helps understand the descriptions in written accounts but also raises questions about the extent, history, and early development of Beta Israel monasteries. Can the remaining structures and the ethnography of communal organization attest to Beta Israel social history in the late medieval period? To what extent did the monasticism of the Beta Israel

resemble Christian monasticism in Ethiopia? Can further research identify the dynamics of identity, demarcation, adaption, and rejection between the various monastic cultures in Ethiopia, whether from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or from the more distant past?[3] Kribus and Krebs' findings will surely inspire the promotion of future in-depth archaeological research on Beta Israel monasteries.

The concluding section of this collection consists of a response by the eminent Ethiopianist Steven Kaplan, who surveys the field for its relevance to the study of Jewish-Christian relations in Ethiopia, past and present. Kaplan evaluates the contribution of Dege-Müller's work on the one hand and of Kribus and Krebs's research on the other in juxtaposition with previous studies. He highlights their innovative and original input to the field in general and to the study of Ethiopian Jews under Christian domination in particular. We welcome similar responses to the other articles in this collection; as this is an online publication, future contributions can be readily appended as the need arises.

The last contribution, by Barbara Roggema, was already introduced at the outset. Its importance lies in outlining the guidelines for scholars interested in contributing source entries to the *Jewish-Christian Relations between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean* (JCR-MIO) source survey designed to serve as reference tool for producing future studies such as those collected in this Entangled Religions special issue and aiming at writing a comprehensive history of Eastern Jewish-Christian relations and exchange in the premodern period.

The articles in this volume consist of diverse case studies of encounters between and expressions of very specific religious communities of Jews

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3   The Beta Israel and Christians were not the only religious groups to have had or have a monastic tradition. For Muslim monasteries, see Abbink 2008.

and Christians scattered between seemingly disparate lands, each characterized by its own political and religious balance of power. The thread of interreligious encounters running through the wide variety of topoi discussed in the articles is interwoven into the connected history of the various Asian and African regions from the rise of Islam through the seventeenth century, even as the necessity to examine this material in greater depth also becomes clearer.

Horden and Purcell (2000), in their analysis of the cultures of the Mediterranean, stressed the need to address the relations between centers and hinterlands and to examine the notions of connectivity and continuity while considering the local conditions and peculiarities of a given case. One might suggest that this directive would serve well in the broader geographical scope of the historical study of interreligious relations, in particular (but not exclusively) of Jewish-Christian interactions in Asia and Africa. The studies presented here demonstrate the extent to which Jewish-Christian relations were shaped by changing circumstances depending on social and cultural contexts, even as they indicate interconnections across a vast range of regions tied by established routes of trade, travel, and migration. The interreligious exchanges and the cross-cultural contacts might have contributed to the supra-regional connections and intersections as much as they were affected by them.

Finally, much of the theoretical formulations in current scholarship about processes of "othering" and interactions between Jews and Christians is based on one geographic region, namely Western Europe, which, if viewed within the economic, political, and religious context of the medieval world, was at best but one of many centers, and indeed one which had relatively low levels of religious diversity in comparison to the ones analyzed here. We hope that this edited volume heralds a shift of focus from Europe to Asia

and Africa and a paradigm change in the historical study of interreligious contacts and conflicts between Eastern Jews and Christians.

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The Shaykh and the Others

Sufi Perspectives on Jews and Christians in Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt

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ABSTRACT   This paper focuses on Sufi attitudes towards Jews and Christians in Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Egypt, as reflected in hagiographic literature of the time. This will shed further light on interfaith relations in a society where Jews and Christians lived under Islamic rule in the condition of *ahl al-dhimma* (lit. "protected people"), implying an overall condition of social and juridical inferiority. With this in mind, works by four prominent Sufi authors have been analyzed: *al-Risāla* by Shaykh Ṣafī l-Dīn ibn Abī l-Manṣūr (d. 1283), *al-Kitāb al-waḥīd* by Shaykh Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī (d. 1308), *Laṭā'if al-minan* by Ibn ʿAṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309), *Durrat al-asrār* by Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (fl. 1320s). This first survey shows a wide variety of attitudes towards Jews and Christians, ranging from interreligious violence to dialogue for converting and also to mutual respect, while adhering to the principles of *dhimma* and maintaining hierarchical relationships between Islam and other religions.

KEY WORDS   Sufism; *Dhimma*; representations of Otherness in medieval Islam; interfaith contact; Jewish-Muslim relationships; medieval Egypt

Sufi Hagiography as Historical Source Material

As is now generally acknowledged, Sufis (Muslim mystics)[1] played important

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1   In the last few years, the conventional definition of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) as "Islamic mysticism" has been challenged by some scholars following "post-colonial" and "anti-Orientalistic" approaches, on allegations that a notion such as mysticism has an outward orientation definitely at odds with the active role that most Sufis played in history; for

roles in the religious, intellectual, and socio-political life of Egypt from Ayyubid times onwards.[2] Therefore, research on Sufi attitudes towards the so-called "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*)[3] may contribute a great deal to better understanding interfaith relations in a social context where Jews and Christians lived under Islamic rule and where the conditions of *dhimma* (lit.

an excellent presentation of these positions, see Hofer 2015, 3–7. On the other hand, as Sara Sviri pointed out, "modern Arabic has borrowed the term *taṣawwuf* in rendering what in European languages is named mysticism" (2012, 19). So, she argues, what is required is not a "neologism" to define Sufism but a broader understanding of the very notion of "mysticism" as "a current within religions and cultures associated with voluntary efforts aimed at gaining an intensified experience of the sacred" (20). In a similar vein, the prominent Egyptian philosopher and Sufi intellectual Abū l-Wafā l-Taftāzāni (d. 1994), who proudly emphasized the worldly dimension of Sufism as a fundamental and distinctive element of Islamic spirituality, willingly used the word *taṣawwuf* as an equivalent for "mysticism", including with reference to the non-Islamic context (see in particular 1991, 15–19; 1996, 47). It is on these grounds that I use the definition of Sufism as "Islamic mysticism" in the present paper.

2   On quite a general note, if most Western scholars dealing with Sufism from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century were mainly (though not exclusively) focusing on doctrinal issues and history of ideas, the second half of the twentieth century has definitely been marked by a "social" turn in Sufi studies, meaning a growing interest in the multifarious roles played by Sufis as social actors in different times and places of the Islamicate world. The bibliography on this issue being too large to be evoked here, see Knysh 2006 (esp. 217–226) and the references provided there for an outline of the historical evolution of Sufi studies in Western academy (including Russia). With special regard to the social history of Sufis in pre-modern Egypt, I limit myself to mentioning the seminal role of such works as Cahen 1954; Lapidus 1967 (especially 105–106, 180–182); Garcin 1966, 1967, 1972; and Winter 1978. In Russian scholarship, however, a social approach to the history of Sufism is found as early as 1914 in Alexander Shmidt's pioneering work on Ottoman Egypt Sufi master ʿAbd al-Waḥḥāb al-Shaʾrānī (d. 1565), quoted in Knysh 2006, 227–228.

3   "This term, in the Qurʾān and the resultant Muslim terminology, denotes the Jews and the Christians, repositories of the earlier revealed books, *al-Tawrāt* = the Torah, *al-Zabūr* = the Psalms, and *al-Indjīl* = the Gospel" (Vajda 2017). From an Islamic perspective, all of the aforementioned books are considered as having been revealed by God but later on corrupted, in form and/or in meaning, by the communities to which they were revealed (see below). For an overall approach to Islamic views of other religions in different epochs and places, see Waardenburg 2003.

"covenant of protection") thus applied in various forms according to places and times, implying an overall status of social and juridical inferiority vis-à-vis Muslims.[4]

In the last decades, a growing interest in Sufi ideas and practices of interfaith contact in medieval Muslim societies has increasingly benefitted from new approaches to hagiographic literature, which have allowed for the valorization of rich source material previously neglected by most of social historians, as Daphna Ephrat pointed out as early as 2002:

> Hagiographic literature, hitherto perceived as entirely devoid of historical value, has [...] attracted the interest of Islamicists as valuable source material. New methods and approaches developed that force scholarship to yield new fruits. At the heart of this growing research lies the assumption that hagiographic texts reflect important features of the societies within which they were composed. These include not only the character and evolution of the phenomenon of Islamic sainthood, but also modes of religious feelings and social practices (Ephrat 2002, 67).[5]

In combining tools and analytical perspectives of philology, literary criticism, social history, and the history of ideas, scholars have been able to produce in-depth analysis of the complex relationships between

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4   For a historical introduction to the theme of *dhimma*, see Ashtor 1949 and Cahen 1991. On the origins of this practice, see also Christ 2006. For new interpretations on *dhimma* in early Islam, see Papacostantinou 2008. On varying applications of the rules of *dhimma* in different geo-historical contexts in the Medieval Islamicate world, see Fierro and Tolan 2013; Fenton and Littman 2016.

5   For pioneering attempts to valorize hagiographical literature as historical source material in Islamic studies, see Garcin 1979, Ferhat and Triki 1986. In comparatively more recent times, and with special regard to medieval Egypt, see Sabra 2000; Chih and Gril 2000; McGregor and Sabra 2006.

hagiographic representations and social realities, as well as to deconstruct the rhetorical strategies adopted by hagiographers in their efforts to shape a certain spiritual tradition and to influence the social formations within which they lived (see, in particular, Amri 2005, 2008, 2015; Hofer 2013, 2015; Cecere 2013b, 2017).

In particular, this has allowed highlighting the role of hagiography as a powerful tool that Sufi authors had at their disposal in their struggle for "discursive control" (Nathan Hofer) over their own Sufi currents and the social fabric at large.[6] In other words, as Nathan Hofer pointed out in his studies on the Shādhilī hagiography, in which he combines Weberian views on social organization with Bruce Lincoln's theories on myth as "ideology in narrative form" (Lincoln 1989, xii), hagiography may primarily be understood as a "mythical construction", that is to say "a narrative encoding of norms and expectations":

Myth, it should be remembered, is not a genre of stories that are false or fanciful, but 'a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it.' [Doniger 1998: 2]. At a very basic level, then, myth is a narrative encoding of norms and expectations. [...]. In the case of the Shādhilīya, these norms and expectations were inscribed in mythic form onto the life of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī through the writings of [Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh] al-Iskandarī. Hagiography—as myth-making—does precisely this. Myth creates the conceptual space wherein the conditions of social reproduction can be transmitted and recreated from generation to generation (Hofer 2011, 148–149).

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6   In Nathan Hofer's studies, the notion of "discursive control" is based on Bruce Lincoln's theories on "discourse and social construction" (see particularly Lincoln 1989, 1999). For Hofer's pioneering application of Lincoln's analytical perspective in the field of Sufi hagiography, see Hofer 2011 and 2013.

Jews and Christians in Islamic Hagiographic Sources in Ayyubid and Mamluk Times: Some General Remarks

As Eric Geoffroy points out in his comprehensive study on Sufism in Mamluk Egypt and Syria, the dominant attitude on interfaith issues among Sufi masters of the time is apparently one of *rigueur* (1995, 69). If a few shaykhs are attributed with positive interaction with *dhimmīs*, as is the case with such controversial masters as Ibn Isrāʾīl al-Dimashqī (d. 677/1278) and Ibn Hūd (d. 699/1300),[7] this is definitely far from being the general rule. As Geoffroy stresses, the great Sufi master Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), usually thought of as a summit of spiritual interreligious openness, shows very different attitudes in his mystical texts and in his juridical ones: in a well-known piece of legal advice to a Seljukid prince, he advocates for strict implementation of the rules of *dhimma* on Jews and Christians (69–70).[8] In other words, when it comes to rules and principles governing social intercourse, even the most tolerant Sufi masters pay attention to religious boundaries.

In this framework, hagiographic literature is no exception: although a systematic study of relevant textual evidence is still to be conducted, representations of Jews and Christians in Muslim hagiographic sources from Ayyubid and Mamluk times seemingly tend to follow some stereotyped patterns. As a general rule, Muslim hagiographers willingly present clichés on supposed doctrinal and moral flaws of the followers of the other

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7   See Geoffroy 1995, 71. On Ibn Hūd, see Goldziher 1894 and Kraemer 1992. On Ibn Isrāʾīl, see Hanif 2002, 67–68.

8   For an in-depth study of this piece of legal advice, see Scattolin 2012.

"heavenly religions" (*adyān samāwiyya*),[9] or stereotyped anecdotes on Jews and Christians converting to Islam following a miracle performed by a certain *shaykh,* showing the latter's generosity and devotion as well as his threatening power and attesting to the truth of Islam: "The supernatural favors (*karāmāt*; "miracles") that Sufis are endowed with are in service of the cause of Islam, by pushing non-Muslims to convert" (Geoffroy 1995, 69–70).[10]

In this respect, Geoffroy reports two representative conversion stories based on miracles performed by shaykhs. In these two stories, the respective spiritual heroes are attributed with two opposite attitudes towards non-Muslims, one of kindness and benevolence and one of sheer hostility and deadly violence (67–72).

In the first story, narrated by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 1565), the Egyptian Shaykh Ḥasan al-Tustarī (d. 797/1394) rescues a Coptic jeweler from quite a risky situation: the jeweler has accidentally broken into two parts a jewel destined to the Sultan's favorite, and now fears for his life. The shaykh, from the bottom of his cell (*khalwa*), listens to the Christian's invocation. By his supernatural faculties, the shaykh changes the Sultan's concubine's mind, so that she asks the Sultan to divide the jewel into two parts, one for herself and one for the Sultan. Faced with this impressive manifestation of generosity and spiritual power, the Coptic jeweler converts to Islam on the spot.

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9   This an Islamic expression cumulatively applying to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity inasmuch as all of these religions are based on books that God revealed, i.e. sent down "from Heaven". For examples of such flaws, see below with reference to the work by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī.

10   For updated and penetrating studies on the issue of conversions, see Yarbrough 2012, 2016.

In the second story, narrated by ninth/fifteenth century hagiographer al-Sakhāwī, it is a shocking manifestation of interreligious violence which causes the conversion of a group of Jews in Damascus at the hands of Shaykh Abū Bakr Ibn Dāʾūd (d. 806/1406). The shaykh enters a synagogue during the Shabbat prayers and cries the Islamic profession of faith: "There is no deity but God" (*Lā ilāh illā Allāh).* In that very moment, a tribune collapses and five eminent members of the Jewish community are killed. Seeing this, all the others prostrate themselves in an act of submission *(islām*) (Geoffroy 1995, 71).[11]

Between the two extreme examples chosen by Geoffroy, a wide range of interfaith attitudes is found in Sufi conversion stories, as Ephraim Herrera (2015) points out in his attempt to draw a typology of narrative patterns of such stories. Based on samples of hagiographic literature spanning from the first centuries of Islam to Mamluk and Ottoman times, Herrera discloses four main patterns governing stories of conversions inspired by Sufi masters:

1. conversion based on a (benevolent or malevolent) miracle (277–283, 505–515);
2. conversion out of simple admiration for a certain shaykh's moral behavior (283–287, 515–516);
3. conversion directly caused by a shaykh's prayers for the concerned non-Muslim (this is considered a kind of miracle, too, however; 273–277);
4. ideological conversion following a controversy between a non-Muslim and a certain shaykh, or the latter's illustration of the principles of Islam (269–273, 495–505).

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11   For some similar patterns in Sufi hagiography concerning Mamluk Jerusalem, see Luz 2002 and 2013.

Needless to say, two or more of these patterns may overlap in one and the same story. This is the case, for instance, with a story which recalls the one mentioned above on the conversion of a group of Jews in Damascus, but which has a far less violent outcome. According to a hagiographer of the Persian Shaykh Abū Saʿīd Ibn Abī l-Khayr (d. 440/1049), the shaykh entered a Christian church during Mass and had a theological controversy, as it were, with an image of Jesus: the shaykh asked Jesus about his relationship to God, and suddenly the image fell down to the ground, together with an image of Virgin Mary, both of them pointing in the direction of Mecca. At seeing this miracle, all those present converted to Islam on the spot (Herrera 2015, 278).

If this story implies a somewhat rough attitude on part of the shaykh, some other examples mentioned by Herrera (especially in relation to patterns 2 and 3) attribute the concerned shaykh with a definitely gentle attitude and even positive interaction with Jews or Christians (515–516). Nevertheless, this does not imply any contestation of the established socio-religious hierarchies, nor any questioning of the doctrinal superiority of Islam. In these stories, whatever attitude the protagonist is attributed with towards his non-Muslim antagonists, his final goal is their conversion to Islam, presented as the one and only religion of truth.

Against the background of this general overview, the sources focused on in the present paper appear all the more interesting. In fact, as we shall endeavor to show in the following sections, if most of the interreligious references found in these sources do not depart from the patterns outlined up to this point, a few of them do present some elements which may reveal more complex attitudes, especially with regard to the issue of conversion.

The Sources Focused on in the Present Paper

The present paper focuses on attitudes towards Jews and Christians in four hagiographic works by four prominent Egyptian Sufi authors of the Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk periods:

1. The *Risāla* ("The Treatise") by Shaykh Ṣafī l-Dīn Ibn Abī l-Manṣūr (d. 682/1283), presenting an extraordinary gallery of hagiographic portraits of more than one hundred Muslim saints (*awliyāʾ Allāh*, lit: "friends of God") who lived in Egypt or Syria during the author's lifetime

2. The *Kitāb al-waḥīd fī sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd* ("The Unique Book Concerning the Conduct of People Believing in Divine Unity") by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghaffār Ibn Nūḥ (d. 708/1308), a prominent Sufi master in Qūṣ,[12] providing biographic and hagiographic information on shaykhs living in (or interacting with) Upper Egypt at his time, as well as a full-fledged doctrinal exposition on Muslims' relationships with Jews and Christians[13]

3. The first hagiographic work on the eponymous master of the *ṭarīqa* Shādhiliyya Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, that is the *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan* ("The Book of the Subtle Blessings") by the Egyptian Shaykh Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (650 ca.–709/1260 ca.–1309), a leading figure of the Shādhiliyya and a prolific writer whose works have had a deep and long-lasting (though not uncontested) impact on self-

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12   According to Denis Gril, this shaykh was the spiritual leader ("chef spirituel") of Qūṣ in the early eighth/fourteenth century (1980, 241).

13   On this work, see Gril 1980a and Geoffroy 1995, 51–73.

representations and historical developments of this Sufi current and of Sufism at large, up to the present time[14]

4. The second hagiographic work on Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, that is the *Durrat al-asrār* ("The Pearl of Mysteries") by the Maghrebian shaykh Muḥammad Ibn Abī l-Qāsim al-Ḥimyārī, known as Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 724/1324 or 733/1333).

As I shall endeavor to demonstrate in the article, a wide variety of attitudes can be detected in references to Jews and Christians in the abovementioned sources, sometimes even (at least apparently) in one and the same source. The analysis of such references will therefore provide some significant insights into the inner diversity of Egyptian Sufism of the time with regard to doctrines, representations, and practices concerning the "People of the Book".

Sufis, Foreign Christians and Local Dhimmīs in the Risāla by Shaykh Ṣafī l-Dīn

Introductory Remarks

A well-reputed spiritual master in his own right, Ṣafī l-Dīn Ibn Abī l-Manṣūr lived a long and active life and was acquainted with some of the most influential Muslim mystics of the seventh/thirteenth century in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām (Greater Syria). In his *Risāla* he drew impressive hagiographic

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14   For sources and updated bibliographical references on Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī, see Cecere 2013b, 89, n. 2 to 4. On competition for spiritual authority in the early Shādhiliyya, see below.

portraits of more than one hundred of them, showing the great diversity of Sufi personalities, doctrines, and practices in that time. As far as Egyptian Sufi attitudes towards non-Muslims in particular are concerned, four of these portraits are particularly worth mentioning here: those of the shaykhs ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nuwayrī (d. 616/1219), Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mughāwir (d. 619/1222–1223), Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl (d. 616/1219), and Majd al-Dīn al-Akhmīmī (d. 653/1255).

In fact, only the portraits of al-Ṭawīl and al-Akhmīmī directly concern attitudes towards local *dhimmīs* (Christians and Jews living under Muslim rule), whereas the first two (l-Nuwayrī and al-Mughāwir) concern warfare against European Christian armies either in Egypt or on the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, I analyze all four portraits here as they provide us with valuable insights on the representations of the relationship between spiritual election and military commitment in the period under consideration.

Ṣafī l-Dīn's Portrait 1: Shaykh al-Nuwayrī, or 'Miracles at War'

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nuwayrī is described as a Sufi master and a jurisprudent (*faqīh*) who directly engages in military jihad. In 616/1218, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and his sons leave the town of Nuwayra in Lower Egypt for Damietta in order to fight against the Crusaders. There, the shaykh dies as a martyr and performs a posthumous miracle, thus causing the Frank soldier who had killed him to become Muslim on the spot. By resorting to a common rhetorical device in hagiographic texts, Ṣafī l-Dīn even provides a constructed dialogue in which the Frank soldier himself

reports the shaykh's miracle to a merchant from Nuwayra whom he incidentally meets in Acre during a truce:

> The Frank (…) said to him: 'O Muslim, don't be afraid! I am a Muslim like you!', and pronounced the profession of faith (*al-shahāda*). Then, he added: 'I am the one who killed Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nuwayrī. I entered his tent, and hit him on his neck until he died. Then (after he died) I insulted him by saying: 'O priest of the Muslims (*yā qissīs al-muslimīn*), you say in your Qurʾan: *Never think of those who have died in the cause of Allāh* (*fi sabīl Allāh*) *as dead. Indeed, they are alive with their Lord, who provides them.*'[15] But the *faqīh* (= Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān) opened his eyes and said in a loud, powerful voice: 'Yes, *they are alive with their Lord who provides them*'. Then he turned silent. When I saw and heard this, disbelief (*kufr*) was torn from my heart, and I converted to Islam at the shaykh's hands. And I hope that God will forgive me thanks to the shaykh's blessing and my conversion at his hands. (Gril 1986, Arabic text: folios 127 b–128)

Here, sanctity goes hand in hand with *jihād*. Indeed, the shaykh's spiritual election turns his apparent individual defeat (his being surprised and killed by the enemy) into a victory for Islam: the "unbeliever" who killed the shaykh becomes a Muslim, potentially acting as an infiltrator among his fellow Crusaders. In line with common conversion story patterns, in this anecdote the conversion process is triggered by a Muslim shaykh's display of piety and miraculous powers before a non-Muslim, showing the truth of Islam and the shaykh's spiritual election, thus pushing the non-Muslim to embrace Islam "at the shaykh's hands" (ʿalā yaday al-shaykh, a typical formula in such stories).

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15   It is a quotation from Qurʾan, 3, 169.

Ṣafī l-Dīn's Portrait 2: Shaykh al-Mughāwir and the Fifth Column Saint

The association between spiritual election and military *jihād* is all the more evident in Ṣafī l-Dīn's portrait of Shaykh Abū l-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf, significantly nicknamed *al-Mughāwir* ("the one who frequently takes part in military expeditions"). He was an Andalusian mystic who settled in Egypt and became a disciple of Ṣafī l-Dīn's master Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh.[16]

According to Ṣafī l-Dīn, Shaykh al-Mughāwir spent many years "either on military expeditions (*mughāwir[an] bi-l-ḥarb*) or in spiritual peregrination (*siyāḥa*)." However, it is the military side of al-Mughāwir's activity that Ṣafī l-Dīn focuses on in his portrait. The author willingly emphasizes Shaykh al-Mughāwir's contribution to the fight against the Christian *Reconquista* of Spain. Shaykh al-Mughāwir's spiritual election is presented as being in direct service of the war against "unbelievers" (*kuffār*); in fact, on his numerous missions in the enemy's lands, he freely uses his faculty of making himself invisible in order to perform his military tasks. In this framework, Ṣafī l-Dīn reports an anecdote in which the "fifth column" *topos* plays a structural role. One day, a divine order (lit., "a true order coming from the True One", *amr ḥaqq min al-Ḥaqq*) enjoins Shaykh al-Mughāwir to go to the "country of Unbelief" (*bilād al-kufr*; probably referring to some Christian kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula) for a meeting with an unknown *ṣiddīq* (lit., "strictly veracious", which in Sufi jargon denotes one of the loftiest degrees of Muslim saints). There, al-Mughāwir discovers that this *ṣiddīq* is the very king of the country, who secretly converted to Islam and who acts as a

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16   On this well-known Sufi master, who died in 614/1215, see Gril 1986, French section, 217. He is not to be confused with Muḥammad Ibn Abī l-Qāsim Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, a Maghrebian Shādhilī shaykh who was the author of *Durrat al-asrār* (see below).

"fifth column" inside his own Christian kingdom. In addressing the shaykh, the crypto-Muslim king enumerates the many advantages he has due to his condition, both on spiritual and military grounds:

> I am enjoying such benefits (*fawāʾid*) among them (the "Unbelievers") that I would never have had if I were among Muslims. [...] My affirmation of divine Oneness (*tawḥīdī*), my submission to God (*islāmī*), my deeds (*aʿmālī*) are purely consecrated to God only (*khāliṣatan lillāhi*), since no one knows of it. My food is (always) lawful (*ḥalāl*) because it has the status of a war booty (*fayʾ*), on which there is nothing to suspect. Finally, I am serving Muslims much better than if I were the greatest of their kings, because I have the power to protect them against the hostility of the Unbelievers, of whom I have many executed, and whose state I am constantly spoiling. (Gril 1986, Arabic text: folio 67b)

Then, the king proves his assertion by having some clerics beheaded under the pretext of their alleged negligence in serving the church of which they are in charge.

Ṣafī l-Dīn's Portrait 3: Piety, Violence, and Political Activism in Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl

Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl, whom Ṣafī l-Dīn presents as an accomplished juridical scholar and a great spiritual master, is apparently committed to fighting against both external and internal threats (be they real or perceived) to the socio-political order of Islam. On the one hand, Ṣafī l-Dīn reports that Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl died in Damietta "in the year the city was under siege", that is 616/1218, although he does not say whether the shaykh was

actually killed by the enemy or whether he died of natural causes (Gril 1986, Arabic text: folio 55). On the other hand, the shaykh's hagiographical notice is focused on an episode of "moral regulation" against local *dhimmīs*. In fact, Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl is presented as inciting "the commoners" (*al-ʿawāmm wa-l-jumhūr*) of Fusṭāṭ (Old Cairo's) to uprise against the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik Al-Kāmil in protest against a Coptic church being built on the alleged site of an ancient mosque. Quite interestingly, far from criticizing the shaykh's behavior on that occasion, Ṣafī l-Dīn presents this episode as a demonstration of Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl's spiritual election; more precisely, he mentions it as one of the many "miracles/wonders" (*karāmāt*) of the shaykh:

> He was credited with many miracles (*karāmāt)*. Among these, it is said that the shaykh once undertook to uncover a mosque which had been covered by the construction of a church. The Christians plotted to prevent him from it. (The Sultan) Al-Malik al-Kāmil bent on their side, but all the commoners (*al-ʿawāmm wa-l-jumhūr*) rose up (*thārat*) with Shaykh Ḥasan (Gril 1986, Arabic text, folios 53 b–55).[17]

Things went so far that the Sultan himself, while walking on the banks of the Nile, was fiercely contested by the populace and feared being stoned (Gril 1986, Arabic text, folio 54). Surprised by the intensity of that protest, the Sultan resorted to the highest representative of "institutionalized" Sufism, the *shaykh al-shuyūkh* Ṣadr l-Dīn (d. 616–617/1218–1219),[18] who

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17   For Denis Gril's tentative datation of this episode to the period 604–609 AH, see Gril 1986, French section, 127.

18   For biographical information on this jurist and Sufi master, see Gril 1986, French section, p. 234.

was the master of the *khānqā* Saʿīd al-Suʿadāʾ.[19] The Sultan hoped that the latter's spiritual authority might counterbalance that of Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl. Thus, the *shaykh al-shuyūkh* and one of the Sultan's viziers were sent to inspect the site of the contested church in order to investigate the alleged presence of an ancient mosque. Once there, however, they found themselves surrounded by a threatening mob and could only act as if the church were a mosque, thus implicitly approving the protesters' assumption:

> The *shaykh al-shuyūkh* had no alternative but to extend his prayer mat *(sajjāda)* and pronounce the *takbīr* in order to perform the prayer that is prescribed upon entering a mosque (*taḥiyyat al-masjid*). As soon as he was out, the whole church was thrown down (by the mob). If the shaykh and the vizier had not acted like this, they would have remained under the (church's) rubble until the Day of Resurrection. (Gril 1986, Arabic text, folios 54–54b)

The Sultan, feeling that he had been cheated and coerced, decided to exile Shaykh Ḥasan. Such a reaction, however, only resulted in confirming the shaykh's sanctity and reasserting the preeminence of spiritual power over political power. The night after the shaykh left the city, the Sultan had a frightening dream (*manām*): he saw the shaykh and he found himself

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19   This was the first "state-run" Sufi hospice in Egypt. Endowed by Saladin in Cairo in 569/1173, the *khānqā* Saʾīd al-Suʿadāʾ was designed for use by foreign Sufis coming to the city, and included a stipendiary position of Chief Sufi Master (*shaykh al-shuyūkh;* lit. "Master of Masters"). While very little is known about the exact attributions of this office in its first period, it was surely thought of by Saladin as an elite position implying some prestige over other Sufi masters in Egypt. This was very much in line with Saladin's politics aiming at spreading State-controlled Sufism among the masses as a tool of Sunni revival after the Shiʿi Fatimid Caliphate (969–1171). On the office of *shaykh al-shuyūkh,* see Hofer 2014. On the history of *khānqā*-s in Egypt, see Fernandes 1988.

surrounded by the guardians of Hell (*al-zabbāniyya*), who threatened him: "If you do not call Shaykh Ḥasan back, we shall make you die." So the Sultan finally resorted to a vizier who was in good relations with local Sufi networks and asked him to persuade the shaykh to come back.

Shaykh Ḥasan's return, however, marked the Sultan's final humiliation: once back in Fusṭāṭ, Shaykh Ḥasan was summoned by the Sultan but refused to meet him, saying that they had already met (in line with a narrative pattern often recurring in medieval Arabic sources on scholars and saints alike).

In reporting this complex affair, Ṣafī l-Dīn not only represents a scholar rebuking political authorities for being too soft towards *dhimmis* (indeed a commonplace in medieval Arabic sources, even beyond hagiography). More precisely, this account shows how inter-faith tensions might interact with intra-Muslim competition between spiritual and political authorities for discursive control over Egyptian Muslims and, by extension, over Egyptian society at large.

Also, this episode is important for at least two other reasons:

1. It is an example of a popular and spontaneous act of destruction of a non-Muslim place of worship, even in opposition to "state" powers, occurring in the Ayyubid period, in which such practices of "moral regulation" are apparently less documented than in Mamluk times.[20]

2. The crucial role played by a Sufi master as a leader and source of legitimacy of the riot is an important example of interaction between Sufi piety and political activism in the Ayyubid period.[21]

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20   For several examples dating from the Mamluk times, see the references below, and especially El-Leithy 2006. For an example from the Fatimid period, see Cahen 1954.

21   On Sufi attitudes towards political engagement in Fatimid and Ayyubid period, see Lev 2006.

Ṣafī l-Dīn's Portrait 4: Shaykh al-Akhmīmī: Love Across Religious Boundaries?

While Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl does not refrain from violence in order to reassert the socio-political hierarchies established by Islamic jurisprudence among different religious communities, another spiritual master from Fusṭāṭ, namely Shaykh Majd al-Dīn al-Akhmīmī, is credited with a much more open attitude towards others.

Ṣafī l-Dīn represents Shaykh Majd al-Dīn as being tirelessly committed to the good of every human being, beyond all social and religious cleavages, to such an extent that "he was loved by (people of) all groups and denominations" (*tuḥibbu-hu sāʾir al-ṭawāʾif wa-l-milal*). Such description is all the more interesting in that Shaykh Majd al-Dīn is not presented as a marginal or "unruly" figure but as a full-fledged representative of the cooperation (and at times overlap) between mystical and juridical milieus which marked Egyptian society throughout Ayyubid and Mamluk times. According to Ṣafī l-Dīn, the shaykh was largely appreciated for his moral virtues and his excellence in Qurʾanic reading and reciting. For these reasons, the official preacher (*khaṭīb*) of the Great Mosque in Fusṭāṭ (i.e. the mosque of ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ), the pious jurist Taqī l-Dīn Abū l-Ṭāhir al-Maḥallī, wanted Majd al-Dīn to marry his daughter and to succeed him in his prestigious task:

> This shaykh Majd al-Dīn was highly reputed for his dignified poverty (*al-faqr al-naẓīf*) and his gentle sense of superiority vis-à-vis worldly things (*al-ṣalaf al-laṭīf*) as well as for his excellence in Qurʾanic reading and reciting (*al-qirāʾa al-ḥasana wa-l-tajwīd*). Therefore, [all] hearts were attracted to him, to such an extent that the learned and observant (*ʿālim ʿāmil*) imam, the jurist Taqī l-Dīn Abū l-Ṭāhir, [who was] the preacher of [the

Great Mosque in] Fusṭāṭ (*khaṭīb Miṣr*) and a companion (*ṣāḥib*) of Shaykh al-Qurāshī,[22] desired to associate with him. With this aim, he married Majd al-Dīn to his daughter, and appointed him to the office of preaching (*khiṭāba*) at [the Great Mosque of] Fusṭāṭ. Majd al-Dīn succeeded him in this task in a very good way. He attracted all hearts towards him. He had very good character and morals (*kāna ḥasan al-akhlāq*), and was deeply committed to the needs of [all] persons (*kathīr al-māshī fī ḥawāʾij al-nās*) and willing to intercede for their [legitimate] interests. For this reason, he was [much] sought-for (*marghūb)* to intercede for the needs of the rich and the poor (*al-kabīr wa-l-ṣaghīr*), the free and the slave (*wa-l-ḥurr wa-l-ʿabd*), the Muslim and the Unbeliever (*wa-l-muslim wa-l-kāfir*). Therefore, [people from] all social and religious groups loved him (*tuḥibbuhu sāʾir al-ṭawāʾif wa-l-milal*). (Gril 1986, Arabic Text: folios 97 b–98)

Quite interestingly, no mention is made of any conversion to Islam as a result of the shaykh's commitment to the needs of non-Muslims. In this, the story apparently departs even from hagiographic narratives on so tolerant a Sufi master as Ibn Hūd, whose positive interaction with the Jews of Damascus was finally justified, in the eyes of his supporters and his critics alike, with the many conversions he was able to cause.[23]

Indeed, far from molding his portrait of Shaykh Majd al-Dīn on conventional patterns of conversion stories, the author shows the possibility of mutual respect—and even affection—between Muslims and other

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22 Shaykh al-Qurashī, who died in 599/1202, was a highly reputed Sufi saint in his time, as is attested by the notice Ṣafī al-Dīn bestowed to him (see Gril 1986, Arabic text: folios 34b–41b). For biographical information on Shaykh al-Qurashī, see Gril 1986, French section, 232.

23 On doctrinal criticism against Ibn Hūd, see in particular Geoffroy 1995, 70. On historical sources on Sufis' attraction on some Jewish environments and individuals, see especially Goitein 1953, 1988; Fenton 1986; Zsom 2015.

members of the Islamic social fabric. Such attitude of mutual respect, however, does not imply any questioning of the many inequalities of that social fabric, Shaykh Majd al-Dīn being clearly depicted as fully complying with the requirements of the Islamic law and with his exoteric office as a preacher.

If Majd al-Dīn is not attributed with any activity of conversion, neither is he attributed with any critical attitude towards canonical hierarchical relationships between Islam and other religions or between Muslims and other religious communities. On the contrary, the shaykh's benevolence and sense of justice towards non-Muslims are to be understood in the light of conventional views on asymmetrical socio-religious relationships; in a sense, he may be described as a prominent Muslim social actor playing a paternalistic role towards non-Muslim "protected people".

In this, Majd al-Dīn's attitude is not unlike that of some prominent Sufi masters, such as Ibn ʿArabī and Rūmī, whose well-known expressions of spiritual openness to the Other, as Herrera rightly points out, are actually contextualized within a clearly Islamo-centric vision, proclaiming the undisputed superiority of Islam over all other religions. According to Ibn ʿArabī, other revealed religions are to Islam as starlights are to the sunlight (Herrera 2015, 100); in a similar vein, Rūmī states that "All roads lead to the Kaaba" (meaning that the Kaaba, i.e. Islam, is the ultimate goal of mankind; 263).

In addition to this, it is worth noting that according to sources other than the *Risāla*, Shaykh Majd al-Dīn did not refrain from engagement in military *jihād*: Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī, in *Laṭāʾif al-minan*, reports that Majd al-Dīn was present at the Battle of al-Manṣūra (647/1250) under the same tent as Shaykh al-Shādhilī and other prominent Sufis (*fuqarāʾ*: lit., "poor [in God]") and jurists (*fuqahāʾ*) of the time (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 51–52).

Indeed, one should not overlook the fact that Ṣafī l-Dīn, the author of the *Risāla*, expresses his admiration for both Shaykh Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl and Shaykh Majd l-Dīn. This suggests that, however different their spiritual temperament may be, the two masters' fundamental views are not really at odds (at least in the author's eyes). Ultimately, both Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl and Majd al-Dīn act within the "logics of *dhimma*", so to speak: If the former intervenes to restore socio-religious hierarchies threatened by unsubmissive *dhimmīs*, the latter works for maintenance of those hierarchies by ensuring respect of the (asymmetrical) rights of the various actors in the unequal socio-religious fabric.

Excursus: On Violence and Mystics in Medieval Sufism

Until recent times, drawing connections between Sufi mystics, politics, and violence was not usual in Western scholarship.

However, it is worth noting that the first known occurrence of the word *ṣūfī* in an Egyptian source is related to an event in which mystics is actually intertwined with politics and violence, and which dates back to the very beginnings of the third/ninth century. In his *Kitāb Taʾrīkh Miṣr* ("Book on the History of Egypt"), the historian al-Kindī (283–350/897–961) says that in the year 200/815–816 in Alexandria, a *ṭāʾifa (*"sect", "group"*)* of ascetic-minded warriors called "the Sufis" (*al-ṣūfiyya*) and led by someone called ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "the Sufi" (l-Ṣūfī) emerged from among the volunteers engaged in jihad against the Byzantine Empire. These *ṣūfiyya* made themselves known in the city for "commanding good and forbidding evil" (i.e. enjoining other Muslims to act in accordance with religious law). Indeed, they went so far in this commitment that they joined forces with other groups of fighters in

revolting against the governor of the city and killing him.[24] Moreover, the same al-Kindī reports that another group of *ṣūfiyya*, also committed to "commanding good and forbidding evil", were active in Fusṭāṭ (Old Cairo) in the first decades of the third/ninth century and were deeply involved in political life, though apparently not resorting to violence (Tillier 2012, 33).

On a more general note, according to medieval hagiographic traditions an association between inward and outward jihad was found in several major figures that Sufis eventually regarded as their forerunners, such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Ibn Zayd (d. ca. 133/750), Ibrāhīm Ibn Adham (d. 160/777), and ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Mubārak (m. 181/797) (Bonner 1999, 107–134; Knysh 2000, 19; Chabbi 1997). On each of these supposed proto-Sufis, many biographical traditions, often legendary and sometimes contradictory, have developed over the centuries. In fact, some of these narratives were more likely retrospective justifications of later ideas or practices than historically accurate accounts on the lives and deeds of the concerned figures. However, these traditions are of great interest to social and religious history as well. In fact, they show which representations of origins and ideal forerunners of Sufism have been produced by Sufi theorists and historiographers from the third to fourth/ ninth to tenth centuries onward in their efforts to define a Sufi collective consciousness and to set out doctrinal and moral standards for their contemporaries and next generations.

As far as especially the Ayyubid and Mamluk times are concerned, interfaith violence enacted and/or theorized by Sufis has been paid increasing scholarly attention in the last decades (Gril 1980b; El-Leithy 2006;

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24   Muḥammad Ibn Yūsuf Ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kindī, *Kitāb fī taʾrīkh misr wa-wulāti-hā*, in Guest 1912, 162 of the Arabic text. On this episode¸ see also Knysh 2000, 39. On the crucial issue of commanding right and forbidding wrong in the history of Islamic thought, Cook 2010 is an ineludible reference.

Scattolin 2012; Herrera 2015). In this framework, it is worth mentioning Tamer el-Leithy's analysis of some important waves of anti-Coptic violence promoted by Sufis in Mamluk Upper Egypt: against the background of ideological and juridical views fully formulated in a significant body of anti-*dhimmī* literature, he convincingly interprets such violence in terms of "moral regulation".[25]

Within a much broader framework, polemic and even violent attitudes towards Jews and Christians have been taken into due consideration by Ephraim Herrera (2015) in his attempt of a systematic study of Sufi doctrines and practices concerning the "People of the Book" based on impressive textual evidence spanning from the beginnings of Islam to the symbolic date 1856, the year in which the rules of *dhimma* were officially abolished in the Ottoman Empire.

Among other things, all this has contributed to better understanding the well-known Sufi saying according to which "greater" (or "true") jihad (*al-jihād al-akbar*) is one's inner fight against one's own ego (*nafs*), whereas the military fight against a physical, external enemy is just a "minor" form of jihad (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*). Far from implying an opposition between these two kinds of jihad, such a saying rather intends to highlight the correct hierarchy between them, in line with typical Sufi views on the relation between the outward (*ẓāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) dimensions of life (Herrera 2015, 372–388).

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25   In adopting the notion of "moral regulation" from Alan Hunt's theoretical studies (see Hunt 1999), El-Leithy explains it as follows: "By 'moral regulation', I understand a series of discourses and practices whereby some social agents problematize the beliefs and practices of others on moral grounds and seek to impose limitations upon them. It is important to note here that moral regulation is not a strictly top-down process." (El-Leithy 2006, 77)

Ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī: Egyptian Jews and Christians Are No Longer Entitled to Protection

Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghaffār Ibn Nūḥ (708/1308), in his *al-Kitāb al-waḥīd fi sulūk ahl al-tawḥīd*, focuses on the conflictual dimension of interfaith contact.

In this work the "spiritual leader of Qūṣ at the dawn of the 8th/14th century" (Gril 1980b, 241) provides information on mystical doctrines and masters of his time (Gril 1980a, 458–497), but also clearly states his views on the status of Christians and Jews in Muslim societies. This issue is especially developed by Ibn Nūḥ when commenting on a wave of anti-Coptic violence which had broken out in Qūṣ in the year 707/1307 and had resulted in the destruction of an impressive number of churches in one day.

The Mamluk authorities had accused Shaykh Ibn Nūḥ and his followers of inspiring this riot. In responding to these allegations, the shaykh takes a twofold attitude on the issue. On the one hand, he firmly refuses all allegations, proclaiming that neither he nor any of his followers had left their hospice (*ribāṭ*) on the day of the riot. On the other hand, far from condemning the riot, he vehemently attacks *dhimmīs* and provides a full-fledged legal justification for the destruction of non-Muslim places of worship in the whole country, far beyond the episode of Qūṣ.

In his work, Ibn Nūḥ accuses Christians and Jews all over Egypt of exceeding the limits imposed on them by the rules of *dhimma* and tirelessly plotting against "the party of believers in divine unity" (Muslims) with the complicity of (false) new converts (*muslimānīs*) and the connivance of emirs and other corrupt authorities (Gril 1980b, 246–259).

In doing this, the shaykh proves fully aware of the long-lasting juridical debate on the specific condition of Jews and Christians in Egypt. This debate, which resurfaced repeatedly over the centuries, mostly revolved around the *vexata quaestio* as to whether Muslims had conquered Egypt by

force ('anwat^{an}) or by a peace treaty (ṣulḥ^{an}) in the year 21/642.[26] Indeed, the thesis of conquest by treaty (ṣulḥ^{an}) prevailed in the very first decades after the conquest, but it was soon questioned. In fact, since the early second/eighth century Muslim jurists and authorities started supporting the thesis of conquer by force, which granted conquerors more favorable conditions both with regard to taxation and to land ownership.[27]

All this had very important implications, too, on the status of non-Muslim Egyptians. As is well known, the "Pact of 'Umar", the traditional and undisputed reference for *dhimma*, only applies to countries which are submitted by treaty. Therefore, some '*ulamā*', relying on the thesis that Egypt had been conquered by force, argued that *dhimma* did not apply to Egyptian Jews and Christians, and thus called for the demolition of all churches and synagogues and for the removal of all protection for non-Muslims.

Such a trend seems to have been particularly vigorous in the Early Mamluk times, probably in connection with a new wave of Islamization of Upper Egypt.[28] In this debate, Shaykh Ibn Nūḥ takes quite a tough stance, based on a twofold argument:

1. Egypt was conquered by force ('anwat^{an}), so local Jews and Christians have never really been entitled to the status of protected people (*ahl al-dhimma*). As a consequence, their places of worship and all

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26   On this debate in the Mamluk period, see in particular: Gril 1980b, 242–244; El-Leithy 2006, 77–119; Dridi 2009, 112–163. On the historical roots of this debate in the Late 'Umayyad and Early Abbasid period, see Noth 1984, 223–228; Frantz-Murphy 1991, 11–12; Sijpesteijn 2007; Hurvitz 2008.

27   "Between *ca.* 97–122 / 715–740, jurists introduced a whole new series of traditions [...] to assert that Egypt had been conquered 'by force' ('*anwatan*) as opposed to 'by treaty' (ṣulḥ^{an}), and hence all of its land was *kharāj* land, i.e. presumably subject to double the rate of taxation." (Frantz-Murphy 1991, 11–12)

28   On the revival of the process of Islamization of Upper Egypt in early Mamluk times, see El-Leithy 2006, 104–109.

of their goods should have fallen to Muslims since the very time of the conquest. In this, Ibn Nūḥ's view coincides with one of the key arguments of the famous *fatwā* that his contemporary jurist (*faqīh*) Najm al-Dīn Ibn Rifʿa had issued in 701/1301 in the wake of a series of anti-*dhimmī* riots in Cairo: "When a country is conquered by force (ʿanwat*an*), then churches, synagogues, lands, money and mobile goods, all of this is the property of Muslims."[29]

2. However, even if one admitted that Egypt was conquered by treaty (ṣulḥ*an*), the rules of *dhimma* should be considered as repealed in the country. The reason is the lack of renewal of the pact over time and the numerous infringements that Christians and Jews allegedly committed. In the shaykh's eyes, the construction of new places of worship is the most blatant of these infringements.

So, far from proposing any positive view on interfaith contact, Shaykh Ibn Nūḥ advocates for the repeal of any protection of Jews and Christians on the grounds that their allegedly unsubmissive attitudes deprived them of the status of *dhimmīs*. In this light, Ibn Nūḥ's work may well be classified, as suggested by El-Leithy (2006, 76, n. 5), as a particular sub-genre of anti-*dhimmī* literature which considerably developed in Late Ayyubid and Early Mamluk times. This manifold literary production, ranging from sermons to *fatwās* to actual treatises, was characterized by mixing doctrinal and social arguments of interreligious polemics with special focus on the alleged empowerment of Coptic bureaucracy as a threat to the supposedly divinely-ordered social hierarchies between religious groups.[30]

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29   Quoted and transl. in S. Ward, "Ibn Refʾa on the Churches and Synagogues of Cairo", *MedEnc* 5, 70–84 (here, 81), quoted in El-Leithy 2006, 116.

30   El-Leithy (2006, 76, n. 6) mentions seven of such works, including that of Ibn Nūḥ, for the period 640s–750s/1240s.–1350s.

Jews and Christians in the Early Literature of the Shādhiliyya

Introductory Remarks

A wide range of meaningful if often indirect references to Jews and Christians are found in the foundational narratives of the *ṭarīqa* Shādhiliyya. This Sufi group began in Tunis in the second quarter of the seventh/thirteenth century, around the Maghrebian Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), and fully flourished in Alexandria, where al-Shādhilī settled with his favored disciple Abū l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) and some other followers in the mid–640s/1240s. Thanks to their relentless efforts to conjugate the outward and inward dimensions of the Islamic faith, this Sufi current rapidly gained ground throughout the whole of Egypt and North Africa.

In early Mamluk Egypt in particular, the Shādhiliyya soon emerged as a catalyzer of different spiritual trends in Sunni Islam at the intersection of various juridical, mystical, and even philosophical milieus (Cecere 2013a; Cecere 2014a). For these reasons, the Shādhiliyya played a major role in shaping Egyptian Sufism and broader Muslim Egyptian culture in that time and in the following centuries.

Since both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī left no written legacy, our analysis will focus on the works by their earliest hagiographers, namely the *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan* by the Egyptian shaykh Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309) and the *Durrat al-asrār* by the Maghrebian shaykh Muḥammad Ibn Abī l-Qāsim al-Ḥimyārī, also known as Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 724/1324 or 733/1333).

A comparative analysis of interfaith references in these two works is quite interesting for more than one reason. In fact, the production of two distinct biographies of the eponymous master of the Shādhiliyya in the same period (roughly half a century after this master's death) is probably to be explained against the background of the competition that broke out over the Shādhilī spiritual heritage after the death of Shaykh al-Mursī (d. 686/1287). Such competition seems to have led to the formation of at least three collateral lines of spiritual authority: two of them developed in Egypt—one around Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh (seemingly prevailing in Cairo and southern Egypt) and the other one around Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī (based in Alexandria)—, whereas the third line developed in Tunis under the authority of the Masrūqī brothers.[31]

In this framework, the hagiographical works by Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh and Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, who was a disciple of the Masrūqī brothers, might be seen as two conflicting narratives on the origins of the Shādhiliyya (Hofer 2015, chapter 4 and 5). On the one hand, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, through several allusions skilfully scattered throughout the text, presents himself as the true "heir" of al-Mursī and then of al-Shādhilī, thus implicitly claiming spiritual authority over the Shādhilī network and the sublime rank of Pole of His Time (qutb al-zamān).[32] On the other hand, the North African Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, writing his Durrat al-asrār soon after 718/1318 (Amri 2013, 14), i.e. a few years after Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's death, draws a completely different picture of the Shādhiliyya. He emphasizes the high spiritual rank of the Tunisian line and describes intense contact between this group and the Alexandrian masters al-Mursī

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31   On this competition, see Cornell 1998, 150–154; Geoffroy 2002, 173, 178; McGregor 2004, 29–33, 172 n.8, 175 n.36; Hofer 2013, especially 398–399; Hofer 2015, especially chapter 4 and 5. On the Tunisian line of the Shādhiliyya, see Amri 2013, especially 15–19.

32   On the rhetorical strategies Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh sets out in his Laṭāʾif al-minan in order to draw his own "self-hagiographical" spiritual portrait, see Cecere 2013b, 69–77.

and Yāqūt, whereas he mentions Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh only once. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh thus presents a multipolar view of the nascent Shādhilī community as a network whose two main hubs, Tunis and Alexandria, enjoy equal spiritual authority. This is totally at odds with Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's Egypto-centric view of the Shādhiliya as a group coherently organized around the spiritual lineage al-Shādhilī > l-Mursī > Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh.[33]

In this light, one may wonder whether these two authors (and maybe their respective circles) had conflicting views on interfaith issues as well. Indeed, the first findings of our survey seem to indicate that this was precisely the case. On the one hand, both works do not provide full-fledged doctrinal expositions concerning Jews and Christians, and attitudes towards these religious communities are to be gleaned from reports on al-Shādhilī's and/or al-Mursī's deeds and teachings. On the other hand, it is not difficult to see that the two works differ in quantity and quality of references to Jewish and Christian elements (individuals, traditions, doctrines), which might indicate different attitudes on this subject by the two authors (a point that I will try to elucidate in the next sections).

A Conventional Conversion Story in Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh

The main interreligious reference found in Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's work is quite a conventional conversion story, enhancing Shaykh al-Mursī's spiritual

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33   As far as one can judge from representations of the origins in later Shādhilī sources, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's narrative soon surpassed the Tunisian one and turned into what may be called a Shādhilī official historiography. As for Yāqūt, he did not leave any written work; following the example of both al-Shādhilī and al-Mursī, he relied only on oral and living transmissions of his teachings. As a consequence, however, Yāqūt was gradually written out of the competition for discursive control over the nascent Shādhilī community.

virtues. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh reports this story on the authority of Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī, one of al-Mursī's closest disciples in Alexandria:[34]

> He [Shaykh Yāqūt al-Ḥabashī] also informed me: "[One day] I was at Nastaraq, outside Alexandria. Fish there were [usually] plentiful […]. [That day, on the contrary,] I searched for one but I failed to find even a single one. I met the captain of the fishing crew and asked him about fishing: "With this wind" he replied, "not one fish can be caught". This person was a Christian. So I said: "Enter [the sea] with the blessing of God, for the shaykh (al-Mursī) enjoys favor with Him". […] I gave him the money, and he entered the sea, spread the net, drew it in to the shore and he took from the net an abundance such as they had ever seen. The people present were astonished at that. […] Among the fish […], one was bigger than any I had never seen. A Jew came up […] and he sought to buy it. I prevented him from doing so, and sent all the fish to the shaykh (al-Mursī). When he was given the fish, he ordered: "Pick out that [big] fish and bring it to Yāqūt to give to the Jew, for he has a wife with a child who is hungry for fish. There is none today, and he had his eye upon it". So I took the […] fish and gave it to the Jew and informed him of what the shaykh had said. He became a Muslim, together with a group of Jews, the captain of the fishing crew, and a number of Christians. (Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh 1887, 52, our translation; see also Douglas 1993, 208–209)

Shaykh al-Mursī's generosity towards the Jewish family as well as the supernatural support that he gives through Yāqūt's intervention to the Christian fishermen should not lead us to read this story as an example

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34   It is the same Shaykh Yāqūt that I mentioned above in relation to the competition for spiritual authority on the Shādhiliyya after Shaykh al-Mursī's death.

of a purely ecumenical attitude fostering cooperation and mutual respect between followers of different Abrahamic religions and to consider them on equal footing. Indeed, the Shaykh's kindness likely must be understood as a manifestation or proof of his spiritual faculty of *kashf* (that is, knowledge/ perception of invisible things): just as he is aware, by preternatural means, that the Jew has a child who is hungry for fish, so he is probably aware that his own act of kindness will induce the Jew and his family to convert out of admiration for the generosity and the miraculous powers of a representative of the Islamic religion. In the same vein, the support that Shaykh Yāqūt—in the name of his master Shaykh al-Mursī—offers to the Christian fishermen is subordinated to their invocation of a Muslim saint: the ensuing miraculous fishing is meant to show the superiority of Islam over Christianity and make the Christian fishermen recognize which is the "true" religion of God. This anecdote thus fits perfectly into typical narrative patterns of conversion stories, combining hagiographic and apologetic motifs that were apparently common in Sufi literature of the Mamluk period. Here, as in many such narratives, a Muslim shaykh's display of miraculous powers and extraordinary kindness towards non-Muslims testifies to the "truth" of Islam and the shaykh's spiritual election, thus pushing the concerned non-Muslims to embrace Islam.

In the light of the evidence provided by this first survey, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's hagiographic work on the founding masters of the Shādhiliyya does not seem to provide any original perspective on Jews and Christians. Conversely, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's narrative on the origins of the Shādhiliyya presents a quite more nuanced spectrum of references to Jews and Christians, ranging from purely polemical to more complex ones, as we shall see in the next section.

Complex Interreligious Dimensions in Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh

In his *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan*, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Iskandarī does not express any explicit position on relationships with Jews and Christians. In particular, although he eulogistically mentions both Ṣafī l-Dīn's and Ibn Nūḥ's works as authoritative sources on Shaykh al-Shādhili's spiritual election (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 1999, 75), Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh does not show any interest in the interreligious aspects of these two works and does not even hint at the debate on *dhimma* that was so relevant to Ibn Nūḥ. Indeed, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's views on such issues must be gleaned from the rare but all the more interesting references to Jews and Christians scattered throughout the *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan,* the meanings of which are not always obvious or unambiguous.

On the grounds of a first survey of relevant textual material, we have adopted a provisional division of these texts into three groups, ranging from more conventional to more complex and to potentially open-minded attitudes:

1. Conventional apologetic attitudes and stereotypes;
2. Ambivalent attitudes towards the Other's religion and spiritual powers;
3. Possible attitudes of mutual respect in interfaith contact situations.

The Conventional Dimension in Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's Interreligious References

Moral and Doctrinal Flaws of Non-Muslims and the Divinely-ordered Hierarchy Among Religions

As a matter of fact, most mentions of Jews and Christians in *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan* seem to be in line with apologetic stereotyped views based on Qurʾanic interreligious polemics which highlight the others' alleged moral and/or doctrinal flaws.

For instance, Jews are presented as the scriptural model of hypocrisy. In a crucial theoretical passage on sanctity (*walāya*) and divine love (*maḥabba*), Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh recalls the well-known Qurʾanic allegation that Jews' love for life indicates their insincerity in love for God: "Say: 'O you who are Jews, if you claim that you are the friends of Allah *(awliyāʾ Allāh),* excluding the [other] people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful'." (Qurʾan 62:6). In another passage, the author presents al-Mursī as conflating false Sufis with Jews and asserting, in line with traditional exegesis, that the Qurʾanic phrase "avid listeners to falsehood, devourers of [what is] unlawful" (Qurʾan 5:42) was revealed with reference to Jews *(nuzilat fī l-yahūd)* (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 108).[35]

In an equally apologetic vein, al-Mursī is reported as saying that Jesus was "worshipped instead of God" (or at least along with him; Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 108), thus confirming Islamic traditional representations of Christians as polytheists (*mushrikūn).*

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35 On Qurʾanic representations of Jews as hypocrites, see Stillmann 2002 and Urvoy 2007.

As far as actual relationships between Muslims and followers of the other "heavenly religions" are concerned, the following anecdote attributed to the eponymous master al-Shādhilī seems to confirm conventional views on what were considered as the proper socio-religious hierarchies:

Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan [l-Shādhilī] said: "Once, during my (spiritual) wanderings (*siyāḥāt*), I found shelter in a cave (*maghāra*), close to a city inhabited by Muslims. I remained there (in the cave) during three days without having anything to eat. After these three days, some Christians (*nās min al-Rūm*)[36] passed by, as they had landed from their ship close to the place where I was. Where they saw me, they said: - 'A priest (*qissīs*) of Muslims!'[37] Then, they gave me some food and left abundant provisions with me. I was astonished at receiving this support from the hands of the unbelievers (*kāfirīn*), where Muslims had refused (not offered) it to me. And just then, a [preternatural] voice (*qāʾil,* lit. "someone who spoke")[38] said to me: "The [accomplished spiritual] man *(al-rajul)* is not the one who is given support for victory (*nuṣira*) by his friends! Verily, the [accomplished spiritual] man is the one who is given support for victory (*nuṣira*) by his enemies (*aʿdāʾ*)." (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 55)

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36 In Medieval Egyptian texts, the term *rūm* often applies to foreign Christians in general, both Eastern and Western. In Ṣafī l-Dīn, for instance, the expression *sariyya min sarāyā al-Rūm* indicates a raiding party of Christians in Castilla (*fī al-arḍ al-ṭāwīl*) and *bilād al-Rūm* designates "the lands of Christians". See Gril 1986, Arabic section: folios 70 and 99, respectively.

37 In this anecdote, we find the same expression ("priest of Muslims") that a Christian soldier used (albeit with the intention of insult) in Ṣafī l-Dīn's account on Shaykh ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nuwayrī. See above.

38 Arabic: *qāʾil*, lit. : "someone speaking". Here, it means a voice of divine origin, i.e. a *hātif* ("communication from God").

Since the author does not specify whether these Christians were soldiers (Crusaders), pilgrims, or merchants, it is not easy to assess the exact meaning of the word "enemies" *(aʿdāʾ)* in this narration. However, the fact that they are qualified as *kāfirūn* ("unbelievers") indicates a negative attitude towards Christians as such, no matter the specific condition of the group evoked in the anecdote. Indeed, the story embodies a twofold symbolic meaning. Hagiographically, the miraculous support that al-Shādhilī receives from God through such unexpected intermediaries confirms and "magnifies" the shaykh's divine election. In terms of interreligious polemics, the reverent homage of those Christians to a "priest of the Muslims" implies their recognition of the spiritual and moral authority of a representative of Islam, thus confirming the hierarchy of values between the three "heavenly religions" established by Islamic law.

Quite interestingly, this interpretation is supported, in my opinion, by comparison with a slightly different version of the same anecdote that Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh presents in another work of his, the *Tāj al-ʿarūs li-tahdhīb al-nufūs* ("The Bride's Crown. On Discipline of the Souls"; Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2010, 63). This version differs from the other in only a few details, which, however, appear to be quite significant as they make the story more indefinite and therefore more exemplary. In this version the scene is placed not in the surroundings of a Muslim town but in a totally indeterminate desert. More importantly, the "enemies" (*aʿdāʾ*) who feed the shaykh are not designated here by the term *Rūm*, which would have qualified them as *foreign* Christians, but by the general term *naṣārā* that applies to *all* Christians (as followers of *al-Nāṣirī*: "the Nazarene"). This seemingly gives a universal

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scope to such enmity, thus further stressing the apologetic dimension of this story.[39]

Muslim Saints and the Prophets of Israel

In addition to the examples above, a polemical and apologetic attitude can easily be identified behind other inter-religious references, which are linked in various ways to a key concept in Muslim prophetology: Muḥammad's superiority to all previous prophets, all of them being considered *Muslim* prophets, however, in the framework of the full Islamization of Jewish and Christian sacred history.

Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh insists on Muḥammad's preeminence from the very beginning of the book. In particular, in his theoretical introduction to notions of sanctity (*walāya*) and prophecy (*nubuwwa*) in Islam he mentions some well-known hadiths proclaiming Muḥammad's superiority over all prophets and focuses on the Hadith of Intercession (*ḥadīth al-shaʿāfa*), which he quotes in the following version on the authority of one of his exoteric teachers, the Shāfiʿī jurist and *muḥaddith* (hadith scholar) Sharaf al-Dīn al-Dimyāṭī:

> The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "On the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*), [all] human beings (*al-nās*) [...] will go to Adam, peace be upon him, and say: 'Intercede for [us, who are] your

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39   On a more general note, the early masters of the Shādhiliyya seemingly paid much attention to food practices, both as markers of religious identity (what Michel Foucault called "dividing practices") and for supposed relations between licit food habits and one's physical and spiritual health. On these two aspects, see Cecere 2013a and Cecere 2014, respectively. On preoccupation with licit food in Medieval Islam, see Reid 2013, especially 97–143. On the Foucauldian notion of "dividing practices", see Foucault 1982.

progeny. But he will say: 'I'm not fit for such a task (*lastu la-hā*), but you should go to Abraham, peace be upon him. Indeed, he is the intimate friend of God (*khalīl Allāh*)!' So, they will go to Abraham, peace be upon him, but he will say: 'I'm not fit for such a task, but you should go to Moses, peace be upon him. Indeed, he is the one to whom God spoke directly (*kalīm Allāh*)!' So, they will go to Moses, peace be upon him, but he will say: 'I'm not fit for such a task, but you should go to Jesus, peace be upon him. Indeed, is the Spirit of God (*rūḥ Allāh*) and His knowledge (*ḥikma*)!' So, they will go to Jesus, peace be upon him, but he will say: 'I'm not fit for such a task, but you should go to Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him!' So they will come to me and I will say: 'I am (the only one) fit for this task.'" (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 12–13).

As Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh convincingly argues, even the structure of this narration is intended to emphasize Muḥammad's preeminence: the reason why Adam does not directly indicate Muḥammad as the only one who can intercede for humankind, he infers, is that "if the indication of turning to Muḥammad had been given from the beginning, this hadith would not have made it sufficiently clear that no other prophet was granted such a rank (*rutba*)" (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 13–14).

A few lines afterwards, still dealing with sanctity and prophethood, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh comments on the well-known hadith "Those who have science are the heirs of the Prophets (*al-ʿulamāʾ wirāthat al-anbiyāʾ*)" (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 16). Far from taking the word ʿ*ulamāʾ* in its usual sense of "experts in (outward) Islamic sciences", Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh brings it back to its etymological meaning ("sages", "people who have knowledge/science") and argues that with this word Prophet Muḥammad was indeed referring to saints (*awliyāʾ Allāh,* lit. "friends of God*),* because they are the ones who have true science *(*ʿ*ilm*): the science that comes from God and guides human beings

towards God. In other words, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh endeavors to demonstrate that only saints are the true ʿ*ulamā*ʾ and thus the only legitimate heirs of the prophets. In this framework, he quotes another hadith, which has an important interreligious dimension: "Muḥammad [...] said: 'Those members of my community who will have [true] science (ʿ*ulamā*ʾ *ummatī*) will be like the Prophets of Israel *(anbiyāʾ banī Isrāʾīl)*'".[40]

The meaning of such reference seems to be quite complex. On the one hand, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh does not quote this hadith here for interreligious polemical purposes, but only to support his claim that saints, as they are the true ʿ*ulamā*ʾ, are entitled to guide "the community of Muḥammad" (the Muslim community), just as previous prophets were entitled to guide the people of Israel. On the other hand, in light of Muḥammad's preeminence this hadith has a most important doctrinal implication: if Muslim saints, being the true ʿ*ulamā*ʾ, are Prophet Muḥammad's heirs, they not only inherit the same function that the Prophets of Israel had but somehow enjoy spiritual preeminence vis-à-vis those prophets. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh does not express such an idea in a theoretical form. However, he clearly illustrates it through an anecdote which precisely concerns a miraculous meeting between a Muslim saint and a prophet of Israel taking place in contemporary Egypt. The latter should be identified either as Prophet Jeremiah or as the author of the Book of Daniel. In fact, according to local traditions both of them rest in Alexandria, their tombs having been integrated into mosques.[41] As for

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40   ʿ*ulamā*ʾ *ummatī ka-anbiyāʾ banī Isrāʾīl* (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 16; on sources for this hadith, see n. 2)

41   On the one hand, Geoffroy (1998, 172) suggests identifying the unnamed prophet in this passage as Jeremiah, based on *Kitāb al-Ziyārat* by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn Abī Bakr al-Harāwī (d. 611/1215). See also Sourdel-Thomine 1957, 111. On the other hand, on a contemporary Shadhili website the same passage of the *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan* is quoted according to an otherwise unknown version in which the prophet is not unnamed but explicitly identified as Daniel: *dakhaltu masjid al-nabi Dāniyāl bi-l-Dīmās bi-l-Iskandariyya* ("I entered the

the Muslim saint, it is one of the most prominent spiritual masters in the early Shādhiliyya: Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn al-Asmar, who had followed both Shaykh al-Shādhilī and Shaykh al-Mursī but whose spiritual degree was so high that he was considered to be under Prophet Muḥammad's immediate direction (see Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 64). According to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh, he was told the story by the saint himself:

> Shaykh Makīn al-Dīn (al-Asmar) informed me: "I entered the mosque of the Prophet (Jeremiah or Daniel) in Alexandria, in (the area of) al-Dīmās (*masjid al-nabī bi-l-Iskandariyya bi-l-Dīmās*), and I found the Prophet who is buried there. He was standing (*qāʾiman*) [i.e., he had risen from his grave] and was praying, wearing a striped cloak (*ʿabāʾa mukhaṭṭaṭa*). He said to me: 'Go before (me) and direct the prayer'. But I replied: 'You (should) go before (me) and direct the prayer'. [That Prophet replied]: 'Indeed you (Muslims) belong to the community of a Prophet on whom nobody can have precedence (*taqaddum).'* I insisted: 'In the name of this Prophet, [I will not be satisfied] unless you go before [me] and direct the prayer.' But he replied: '[...] In the name of this same Prophet, I will not [be satisfied] unless (you do it)'. [...]. So, I went before him and directed the prayer." (2005, 98)

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mosque of Prophet Daniel that is in the area of Dīmās in Alexandria"). Unfortunately, no indication is provided on which manuscript or printed edition of the *laṭāʾif al-minan* has been used for this quotation. (See https://www.msobieh.com/akhtaa/viewtopic.php?f=17&t=16197, accessed February 23, 2018)
A slightly different version of this meeting between Prophet Daniel and Shaykh al-Asmar is found on another Sufi website. Although the relevant source is left unmentioned, the story is clearly based on that of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh. (See http://cb.rayaheen.net/showthread.php?tid=24907, accessed February 27, 2018)

In this scene, thus, one of the Prophets of Israel is presented as taking a Muslim saint as an imam for prayer, claiming that the latter (though not being a prophet himself) belongs to the community of the most eminent among all Prophets, Muḥammad. In doing this, Jeremiah/Daniel not only acknowledges Muḥammad's superiority over all previous prophets but extends this hierarchical relationship to their respective communities. Along with supporting Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's views on the relationships between sanctity and prophethood, this narrative thus addresses a powerful polemical message to Jews and Christians of the time. In other words, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh implicitly invites Jews and Christians to acknowledge Muḥammad's prophetic message and his superiority over all previous prophets and to embrace Islam or at least to accept the superiority of Muslims over other religious communities (in line with the logics of *dhimma*).

Ambivalent Attitudes Towards the Other: the Magic of Jews

Quite an ambiguous attitude is to be detected behind a tale in which Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh presents a Jewish rabbi (*ḥabar min aḥbār banī Isrāʾīl*) at the crossroad between religious knowledge (which allows him to understand the logics of the relationships between God and the human being) and magical arts (by which he tries to exploit such logics for the sake of a human being). Such representation is all the more interesting in that Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh narrates this tale in a highly sensitive doctrinal framework, namely his discussion on how the righteous should or should not react to offenses (see Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 91-92). In this story, a man robs a poor and righteous woman of her only hen. She does not invoke any punishment for the thief, instead relying entirely on God. When the thief starts plucking

the hen, all the feathers stick to his face and no one can take them away. The thief consults a rabbi, who provides him with the solution: "I see no remedy for you except that the woman [...] invoke God against you: if she does so, you will be healed." Such remedy proves successful, and the rabbi comments: "The woman, when she was robbed of the hen, did not invoke God against the thief, but she handed the whole thing over to God, and God helped her. But when finally she invoked God, she wanted to help herself, and (this is why) the feathers fell from the face of the thief" (Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh 2005, 92).

As mentioned above, the figure of the rabbi is presented here under an ambivalent light: on the one hand, he proves fully aware of the logics of the relationship between God and the human being. On the other hand, he makes use of this awareness to help a sinner and, as it were, to cheat God Himself. In contrast to the woman's mystical attitude of *tawakkul* ("totally relying on God"), the rabbi is thus attributed with a negative theurgical attitude: indeed, the author presents him as being endowed with religious knowledge and spiritual power but using them for distorted aims. In other words, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh both acknowledges and demonizes the Other's religious knowledge and spiritual power.

All this seems quite significant in terms of social representations of Jews and Judaism in the author's environment and in the Egyptian Muslim collective imagery of the time. In particular, this story might be linked to seemingly widespread narratives connecting Jewish culture and religion to the sphere of magical sciences such as those recently studied by Dora Zsom (2013). Though partly inspired in Midrashic stories as reworked in Islamic narratives on Prophets who came before Muḥammad (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), such representations were far from promoting positive views on Jews and Judaism among Muslims. Rather, they contributed to strengthening an ambiguous attitude of demonization and instrumentalization of actual or

supposed Jewish magical crafts. On the one hand, these crafts were seen as proofs of Jews' allegedly defective love for God (as is the case with the story analyzed above). On the other hand, however, some elements of Jewish magic were at times smuggled into some Muslim circles and reused as parts of practices that were represented as fully Islamic. Quite significantly, an example of such "reuse" is to be found, according to Dora Zsom, precisely in the environment of the Shādhiliyya. As she convincingly argues, Jewish influence may in fact be detected behind a Shādhilī talismanic practice called *ḥizb al-dāʾira* (lit., "The Litany of the Circle"), which combined "a magical invocation and the figurative representation of a circle" (2013, 275) and was intended to protect the practitioner from death. If sources inside the tariqa attribute the *ḥizb al-dāʾira* to the eponymous master al-Shādhilī and make no mention of any possible Jewish model or influence, Zsom suggests that the background of such practice can be found in certain Midrashic stories about Moses fighting against death. In this light, how to explain the silence of relevant Shādhilī sources on the possible "Jewish dimension" of this practice? Were these authors merely unaware of such Jewish background (the relevant motifs having perhaps been absorbed and reworked in Islamic traditions prior to the emergence of the practice of the *ḥizb al-dāʾira*)? Or did they deliberately choose to obliterate an origin they felt was embarrassing? At the present state of research, any answer to such questions (and possibly the questions themselves) would be far too speculative.

That being as it may, it is worth noting that Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh for his part is not completely silent on contacts between the early Shādhiliyya and Jewish learned environments. In fact, he narrates only one—quite significant—anecdote on this issue, seemingly crediting the eponymous master al-Shādhilī with an unusually open-minded attitude. This anecdote is analyzed in the next section.

Shaykh al-Shādhilī and the Jewish Ophthalmologist: A Surprisingly Friendly Attitude

A Non-polemical Hagiographic Story?

If most passages from the *Kitāb laṭāʾif al-minan* examined up to this point have an apologetic purpose, the following anecdote apparently has no apologetic meaning at all. Here, Ibn ʿAtāʾ Allāh says:[42]

> I was told that Shaykh Abū l-Ḥasan (l-Shādhilī) - may God be satisfied with him - asked a Jewish ophthalmologist (*yahūdī kaḥḥāl*) to heal one of those who lived with him (*baʿḍ man ʿindahu*; i.e. one of the shaykh's disciples or family) but the Jew said to him: "I am not allowed to heal (anybody). In fact, a decree (*marsūm*) has been issued in Cairo, stipulating that no physician may practice [medicine] without a special permit (*idhn*) by the supervisor of medicine (*mushārif al-ṭibb*) in Cairo". As soon as this Jew went out [from the shaykh's house], the shaykh ordered his servants (*khudamāʾ*): "Prepare what is required for travel". He immediately set off and he did not stop until he was in Cairo. There, he obtained a permit for that physician *(ṭabīb)*, and he [immediately] went back to him [in Alexandria], without even spending a single night in Cairo. As soon as he arrived at Alexandria, he summoned that doctor. The latter excused himself for the same reason he had excused himself before. Then, the shaykh showed him the paper with the permit, and the Jew was greatly astonished (*akthara l-yahūdī min al-*

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taʿajjub) at the shaykh's noble and generous nature (*min hādhā l-khalq al-karīm*) (Ibn ʿAṭaʾ Allāh 2005, 152–153).

In this story, al-Shādhilī is attributed with a confident and respectful attitude towards a Jewish physician: the shaykh asks the *kaḥḥāl* to heal someone from his closest entourage and goes so far as to solve the physician's bureaucratic problem with the Mamluk medical administration.

Though the shaykh's generosity might seem to be in line with the common pattern of conversion stories, the outcome of the story is totally unexpected: the Jewish physician shows his gratitude and admiration for the Muslim shaykh's generosity, but no mention is made of any conversion.

In contrast to conventional apologetic stories, Ibn ʿAṭaʾ Allāh shows the possibility of an attitude of mutual respect between Muslims and non-Muslims. Without crediting Ibn ʿAṭaʾ Allāh with a pluralistic attitude *avant la lettre*, the importance of such anecdote in terms of practices of interfaith contact should not be overlooked.

Polemical Attitudes Against Non-Muslim Physicians

The attitude attributed to al-Shādhilī in the anecdote mentioned above is decidedly at odds with deep-rooted attitudes of caution or even of sheer hostility towards non-Muslim physicians expressed by several Muslim thinkers, including some prominent Sufi masters, in different times and places.

On the one hand, Jewish and Christian doctors were numerous and highly appreciated in Medieval Egypt and their services were much sought-after by Muslims of all social backgrounds, as is well exemplified by the

famous relationship between Saladin and Maimonides (Ashtor 1956; Mazor 2014).

On the other hand, however, the practice of resorting to non-Muslim doctors did not cease to arouse vocal criticism in several juridical and mystical milieus over centuries.

As Paulina Lewicka (2012) argues in her study on medical culture and inter-faith antagonism in Egypt and Syria, such criticism apparently grew stronger throughout the Mamluk times. Although Lewicka explicitly mentions only one Sufi master (Shaykh al-Sha'rānī) among the supporters of this trend (22), it is quite probable that juridical advice against resorting to non-Muslim physicians might have a large circulation in Sufi environments of the time.

Beside this, some significant examples of polemical attitudes against non-Muslim doctors analyzed by Herrera (2015) are directly relevant to the purpose of the present paper:

1. One of the most revered *auctoritates* for the early masters of the Shādhiliyya, the fifth-sixth/eleventh-twelfth-century theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), whom they also considered as one of the highest saints in history, overtly complained that only a few Muslims embraced the study of medicine, as this compelled Muslims to resort to Jewish and Christian physicians (100).

2. In the same vein but with a much more hostile attitude, one of the most renowned Sufi masters in Ottoman Egypt, Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rāni (d. 973/1565), affiliated with the Shādhiliyya, enjoined Muslims not to take Jewish or Christian physicians. This was because only Muslim physicians were credited with relying on God's assistance, which was considered the indispensable condition for true healing. In case one could not find a Muslim doctor, one had to patiently wait for God's help instead of addressing a non-Muslim

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doctor in any way. Also, in a move that speaks volumes about this Sufi master's views on other religions, Shaykh al-Shaʻrāni went so far as to say that resorting to Jewish physicians was even worse than resorting to Christian ones because Jews were "morally depraved" (385).

3. Along with overtly polemical texts, Herrera identifies a special sub-genre of conversion narratives in which a righteous Muslim seeks the help of a Jewish or Christian doctor against a bodily disease, but this is actually an excuse to heal the non-Muslim from his spiritual disease, the therapy being, of course, the doctor's conversion to Islam (383 ff.).

In the light of these remarks, however fragmentary they may be, the conduct that Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh attributes to Shaykh al-Shādhilī appears exceptional or at least rather unconventional, especially because the shaykh's addressing of a Jewish doctor is not even justified by the purpose of converting the latter to Islam.

From Physical to Spiritual Contact?

In consideration of the key role usually attributed to sight (both physical and spiritual) in Sufi literature, al-Shādhilī's choice to entrust a person from his closest entourage to a Jewish ophthalmologist might indicate a special degree of openness to interfaith contact, especially with regard to Jewish learned environments. The fact that medicine was often practiced by rabbis in medieval Egyptian Judaism might further corroborate this assumption.[43]

In this framework, it is worth noting that the earliest treatise on the Sufi practice of *dhikr* (invocation of God's name), composed in the milieu of the Shādhiliyya, the *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ* ("The Key to Salvation"), traditionally

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43   For an overview on this topic, see Isaac 1990.

attributed to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh himself,[44] provides an indirect but quite interesting indication of possible contacts between the early Shādhiliyya and some Jewish circles in such an intimate sphere as spiritual practices. In fact, the author describes a special meditative posture otherwise known as *tazyīq*, which consists of putting one's head between or on one's knees in association with recitation of *dhikr* formulas implying the evocation of God's names. As first noted by Paul Fenton (1990; 1991; 1992), the same association between the "head between knees" posture and the evocation of the Divine Name characterized some Jewish mystical traditions, especially in the circle of the so-called "Jewish Sufis" which developed in Ayyubid Cairo around Avraham Maimonides (d. 1237) and lasted for more than one century well into the Mamluk era.[45]

However, at the present state of research it would be too daring to speculate on the possible meaning of the simultaneous presence of this practice in both Muslim and Jewish spiritual circles. In particular, as I pointed out in a previous study, no clear indication has yet been found on whether this was simply the effect of parallel historical developments in the respective traditions or if both groups mutually influenced each other in keeping such practice (Cecere 2016, especially 285–286). In this respect, a specific difficulty is to be remarked concerning Islamic Sufi literature. In fact, whereas Jewish sources provide explicit mention of contact with Muslim Sufis, and further evidence in this sense is found in some of the Cairo Genizah documents (Fenton 1986; Zsom 2015), Muslim Sufis are apparently silent about Jewish Sufis.

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44   On the attribution of *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ*, see Russ-Fishbane 2013, 308, and 328 n. 4.

45   Among the most recent works on the complex historical experience of Jewish Sufism, see Fenton 2003, 2006; Hofer 2013, 2015; Loubet 2013; Russ-Fishbane 2015.

Mutual Respect and Hierarchical Relationships

For all of the reasons discussed above, I argue that in the anecdote about the Jewish doctor Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh attributes the eponymous master al-Shadhili with an attitude implying mutual respect and even cooperation between a Muslim and a Jew.

On the one hand, such attitude appears exceptional compared to other textual material analyzed in the present paper, a possible parallel (for some aspects at least) being found only in Ṣafi l-Dīn's portrait of Majd al-Dīn al-Akhmīmī (see above). On the other hand, as is precisely the case with Majd al-Dīn, one should not overestimate the innovative potential of such open-minded attitudes towards interfaith contacts. In other words, mutual respect between Shaykh al-Shādhilī and the Jewish ophthalmologist does not justify a claim for questioning hierarchical relations between their religious communities. Indeed, the ideological meaning of this anecdote is to be understood in the theoretical framework consistently evoked by the many other passages directly or indirectly concerning Jews and Christians in Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's *Laṭāif al-minan,* all of them ultimately supporting conventional views on non-Muslims and hierarchical relationships between religions.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed direct and indirect references to Jews and Christians in the hagiographic production of four prominent Sufi masters who lived or were active in Egypt in the Late Ayyubid and/or Early Mamluk period.

Although further inquiry is of course required, the first findings of this analysis show a wide variety of attitudes towards Jews and Christians

among Egyptian Sufis as well as contacts between Sufis and *dhimmīs* ranging from interreligious violence to dialogue on conversion to actual tolerance, albeit in the framework (for of all of these authors) of unshaken adherence to the principle of hierarchical relations between Islam and the other "heavenly" religions.

In particular, it is worth noting that the authors under consideration do not seem to share any specifically "Sufi" attitude on this topic. In other words, the mere fact of being a Sufi did not imply adherence to any specific set of principles or views on interfaith issues that would be common to all (or most) Sufis.

Indeed, the only common denominator that seems to emerge from the textual evidence analyzed above is constant reaffirmation of the religious hierarchies established by Islamic law. Different interpretations of this shared reference might however have quite different impacts on social representations of non-Muslims and on actual social intercourse, as is easily seen when contrasting Ibn Nūḥ's and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's attitudes.

In other words, one should rely precisely on different authors' individual approaches to this common reference framework and not on retrospective or metahistorical notions of "Sufi tolerance" in order to develop further research on attitudes towards Jews and Christians in medieval Egyptian Sufi circles.

Acknowledgement

Zvi Institute of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations (JCMCentre) of the Open University in Ra'anana.

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"Oil, which shall not quit my head": Jewish-Christian Interaction in Eleventh-century Baghdad

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ABSTRACT   The last influential head of the Pumbadithan Academy in Baghdad, R. Hayya Ga'on (939–1038), requested his Sicilian student R. Maṣliaḥ ben Eliah al-Baṣaq to inquire with the Nestorian Patriarch (Catholicos) about the Syriac definition of a word in Psalms (141:5). Upon R. Maṣliaḥ's protests, R. Hayya rebuked his student, saying "our pious forefathers and ancestors would inquire regarding languages and their explanations from members of different religions, even from shepherds". Despite scholarly treatment since 1855, a new, analytical reading of the text, based upon manuscripts, external sources, and comparative literature, provides fresh approaches towards understanding Jewish-Christian scholarly interaction in Baghdad at the turn of the eleventh century, particularly in comparison to those in Sicily. Additionally presented are new facets in Peshitta studies.

KEY WORDS   R. Hayya Ga'on; R. Maṣliaḥ ben Eliah of Sicily; Geonic Literature; Jewish-Christian interaction; Nestorian Patriarch (Catholicos); Targum; Syriac; Peshitta

Introduction

Sometime in the beginning of the eleventh century, a curious episode transpired between two religious leaders in Baghdad, one Jewish and one Christian. Namely, the Jewish leader R. Hayya requested Bible commentary from an unnamed Nestorian Patriarch. Since its excerpted publication in 1855 from a manuscript of a commentary to *Song of Songs* in Judeo-Arabic by R. Yosef ben Yehuda ibn 'Aqnin (Steinschneider 1855, 57), followed by a

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full publication in 1964 of ibn 'Aqnin's commentary (Halkin 1964, 494–495), the episode has drawn attention to R. Hayya's willingness to avail himself of Christian commentary.

However, despite tens of citations of the episode, all citations refer back to the same original publications, which are based upon the reading in a single manuscript (in Judeo-Arabic), Oxford Pocock 189 in the Bodleian Library (Neubauer 356). Abraham Halkin (1964), too, based his edition on the Oxford manuscript and provided a critical apparatus to his edition based on a parallel (fragmentary) manuscript in the Jewish Theological Seminary library, Lutzki 1056 (EMC 155). However, a critical analysis of the two witnesses has yet to be done. Current research is still based solely upon the Oxford manuscript readings, with only two scholars mentioning the variant readings from the JTS manuscript (Greenbaum 1978, 317; Gil 2004, 591, citing Greenbaum).

A critical comparison of the Judeo-Arabic text in the two manuscripts reveals that the JTS manuscript is superior to the Oxford manuscript, providing a more accurate reading. Therefore it should be used as the base text, rather than the Oxford manuscript (although it should be noted that the JTS manuscript is not without its own errata). In the following pages, I present a new reading of the text, followed by an in-depth analysis of the episode as well as cross-references to parallel sources (one of which is still unpublished). Additionally, since the account revolves around a Biblical verse, the verse and its commentary will be discussed in an attempt to provide both a historical background and a literary perspective for the episode. Following this, I offer a re-evaluation of the cultural background of the characters involved in the incident.

Finally, it should be stressed that a good deal of the topics related to this episode and touched upon in this article has yet to be thoroughly

researched. Firstly, a critical edition of R. Hayya's Judeo-Arabic dictionary, which would have provided a safer ground for philological analysis, is still a desideratum. Secondly, we have scanty information regarding the Jewish usage of the Peshitta (Syriac Bible tradition).[1] Thirdly, there is still no conclusive research regarding the date and the location of the composition of the Jewish Aramaic translation of Psalms, its transmission, and its acceptance. And, fourthly, very little is known about the Jewish community in Sicily in the eleventh century. Thus, while in many ways this article is programmatic, posing questions to be answered by future research, it provides a textual and intertextual analysis that may in turn point at venues for further studies on the above-mentioned topics.

Ibn ʿAqnin's Text (based on JTS Lutzki 1056): Retelling of the Anecdotal Encounter

R. Yosef ben Yehuda ibn ʿAqnin, a thirteenth-century Spanish-born North African scholar, composed a Judeo-Arabic commentary to the Biblical book *Song of Songs*: *Inkishāf al-asrār wa-ẓuhūr al-anwār* (אנכשאף אלאסראר וטהור ואלאנואר), or "Divulging of Secrets and Appearance of Lights". In his concluding essay, ibn ʿAqnin elaborates upon the permissibility of utilizing non-Jewish sources as commentary and proof-texts. One of his sources in his argument is the following anecdote, which transpired close to two centuries prior (Halkin 1964, 494–495). R. Hayya (939–1038), the last influential Gaʾon (head) of the Pumbadithan Academy (*Yeshiva*) in Baghdad, sent his Sicilian student R. Maṣliaḥ ben Eliah al-Baṣaq to ask the Nestorian

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1   The Peshitta is the standard version of the Bible used in Syriac Christian churches, supposedly translated from Hebrew to Syriac (a dialect of Eastern Aramaic).

Patriarch (Catholicos) what his tradition of a phrase in Psalms (141:5) was. Upon R. Maṣliaḥ's protests to the mission, R. Hayya rebuked his student, saying "our pious forefathers and ancestors would inquire regarding languages and their explanations from members of different religions, even from shepherds and cow-hands".

This incident is evidence of Jewish and Christian scholars interacting in Baghdad at the turn of the eleventh century. It was first brought to the attention of scholars by Moritz Steinschneider in 1855 as a historical fact regarding R. Maṣliaḥ's life and history (1855, 57). Since then, this anecdote has been offered in every scholarly mention of R. Maṣliaḥ (for a summary of the references, see Gil 2004, 591; Simonsohn 2011, 71–72). Furthermore, as is to be expected from its relevance to R. Hayya's biography, the incident has been noted by scholars who discussed his life or, alternately, his reliance on non-Jewish sources in his writings (Sklare 1996, 74; Brody 1998, 301; Maman 2000, 353–354, 368–369). Additionally, this account has been utilized in Bible studies (Leonhard 2001, 160; Carbajosa 2008, 267–268) as well as in an attempt to date Aramaic Bible traditions (Weitzman 1999, 74, 209). The episode, as told by R. Yosef ibn ʿAqnin, is as follows:

> The Nagid (R. Samuel ibn Nagrilah), may his soul rest in Paradise, recounted with this in his work *The Book of Contentment*, after having cited at length Christian commentaries, how R. Maṣliaḥ ben al-Baṣaq, *Dayan* (judge) of Sicily, wrote him upon his return from Baghdad, an epistle in which he included the demeanor of R. Hayya Gaʾon of blessed memory and his meritorious traits, and recounted among other things how one day in the gathering the verse *šemen roš ʾal yani roši* (שמן ראש אל יני ראשי) was mentioned and the attendees disagreed over its interpretation. R. Hayya bade R. Maṣliaḥ to go to the Christian Catholicos to ask him what commentarial traditions he has for this verse. This was odious to him (R.

Maṣliaḥ). He (R. Hayya Gaʾon) of blessed memory, upon seeing how distressing the behest was for R. Maṣliaḥ, the Gaʾon of blessed memory reproached him saying "our pious forefathers and ancestors who are our paragons would inquire regarding languages and their explanations from members of different religions, even from shepherds and cow-hands, as is well known and passed down". He (R. Maṣliaḥ) arose and went to him (the Patriarch) and asked him. He (the Patriarch) told him (R. Maṣliaḥ) that their [tradition] in Syriac was *mšḥa d-ršyaʿa la ʿady ryšyh* ("oil of the wicked shall not be upon his head", ܡܫܚܐ ܕܪܫܝܥܐ ܠܐ ܥܕܝ ܪܝܫܝܗ, משחא דרשיעא לא עדי רישיה.[2]

Before presenting an analysis of the text, it is incumbent to point out that the information provided in this account is secondary, if not possibly tertiary. Ibn ʿAqnin clearly states that R. Maṣliaḥ, a principal figure in the event, later transmitted what transpired to R. Samuel ibn Nagrilah, the Nagid (communal leader), in Grenada. R. Samuel quotes this account in his own work, *Kitāb al-istighnāʾ* (the Book of Contentment)[3], which in

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2   The English text above is a translation from the following Judeo-Arabic original, based primarily on Ms. JTS Lutzki 1056, with variant readings from Ms. Oxford Poc. 189 (Neubauer 356). I am indebted to Prof. Mordechai Akiva Friedman for his invaluable assistance in determining the primacy of Ms. Lutzki 1056 and editing the text and translation. Needless to say, any errors rest with the author alone. The Patriarch's quote is per Ms. Oxford Poc. 189. JTS Lutzki 1056 has a slightly different reading which is discussed below.

וד׳כר אלנגיד נ״ע פי כתאב אלאסתגנא מע הד׳א ענד מא אכת׳ר מן ד׳כר שרוחאת אלנצאר אן ר׳ מצליח בן אלבצק דיין צקליא כ׳אטבה ענד ורודה מן בגדאד ברסאלה צ׳מנהא סירה רבי׳ האיי גאון ז״ל ואת׳ארה אלפאאצ׳לה וד׳כר פי ג׳מלתהא אן פי בעץ׳ אלאיאם וקע פי אלמג׳לס ד׳כר הד׳א אלפסוק שמן ראש אל יניא ראשי פאכ׳תלף פי שרחה אלחאצ׳רון פאשאר רבי׳ האיי ז״ל אלי ר׳ מצליח אן ימשי אלי ג׳אתליק אלנצארי יסאלה ען מא ענדה פי שרח הד׳א אלפסו׳ פאנכר עליה פראי ז״ל אן עט׳ם בר׳ מצליח הד׳א אלאמר פאנכר עליה אלגאון ז״ל קאילא קד כאן אלאבא ואלסלף אלצאלח והם אלקדוה יבחת׳ון ען אללגאת ואלשרוח ענד אלמלל אל מתבאינה חתי ענד רעאה אלגנם ואלבקר עלי מא הו מעלום מנקול פנהץ׳ אליה וסאלה וקאל לה אנה ענדהם בלסאנהם אלצריאני משחא דרשיעא לא עדי רישיה.

3   The work has not survived intact and to date only fragments of it and quotations from it found in other works have survived. From these scanty sources, it is apparent that the work was a Biblical lexicon, encompassing a broad range of material, its entries having

turn served as ibn 'Aqnin's source, according to the latter. Additionally, R. Maṣliaḥ is mentioned with the epitaph '*z"l*', an acronym for *ziḵrono li-ḇraḵa*, "of blessed memory". This blessing is usually reserved for the dead, and is therefore obviously not a part of R. Maṣliaḥ's original re-telling of the account. Further, R. Maṣliaḥ (died circa 1061) outlived the Nagid (died circa 1056) by more than five years; it is thus almost certain that this blessing cannot be the handiwork of the Nagid either, but rather of ibn 'Aqnin himself. This minor piece of evidence of editing by ibn 'Aqnin suggests that further emendations in the retelling might exist as well. Thus, while from a broad perspective we can safely assume we are reading R. Maṣliaḥ's transmission of the episode as preserved by the Nagid and then quoted by ibn 'Aqnin, a measure of caution is still required before attempting to draw conclusions based strictly upon the text as before us.

The first point in our analysis is the setting in which this incident took place. The Judeo-Arabic text defines it by the Arabic term *majlis*. Though this Arabic word most commonly means "gathering" or "assembly", in this context it seems fairly clear that the intended Hebrew translation of the original Judeo-Arabic should be *Yeshiva*, the Hebrew term commonly denoting a Rabbinic Academy (Sklare 1996, 100; Blau 2006, 92). Additionally, it seems most logical that had the setting been an interfaith gathering for the purpose of debate, as was common in Baghdad at the time (and also known as *majlis*, see below), the Sicilian R. Maṣliaḥ would have protested against participation in such a venue to begin with. The implication of defining *majlis* as *Yeshiva* is that the discussion arose between the students and the Master within the confines of R. Hayya's Academy in Baghdad. The setting is then to be viewed as a closed one, an internal debate between the

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been arranged by root in alphabetical order. From the fragmentary evidence, it is clear that the Nagid made frequent comparisons, lexicographical as well as grammatical, to Arabic cognates (Eldar 2014, 70–71).

Academy's faculty and students over a Biblical lexeme, perhaps philological (see below), although we cannot completely rule out the possibility that the debate started as an outgrowth of studying some unmentioned Rabbinic text.

This episode is echoed in another, almost identical episode related in an anonymous Judeo-Arabic commentary to Psalms 103:5 (Harkavy 1970, 113; Ben Sasson, 1991, 137). Here, too, R. Samuel the Nagid is quoted, recounting how R. Maṣliaḥ transmitted to him how he was present before R. Hayya Gaʾon when a discussion arose regarding a verse in Psalms. However, in this account R. Hayya Gaʾon settled the argument by citing a work of his own, his Compendium (see below), to weigh in on the correct definition.

While this second incident of Bible exegesis/philology within the Academy was eventually resolved internally, it seems R. Hayya Gaʾon deemed our question required outside expertise. The contrast in sending a Talmud scholar to inquire after a definition from the highest Christian authority in the East for the purpose of settling an internal dispute is indeed quite striking, especially when compared to a very similar account.

Psalms 141:5 and its Jewish and Syriac Christian translation traditions

The next step in our analysis is the subject of the debate. The account as presented by ibn ʿAqnin involved a question regarding Psalms 141:5: "יֶהֶלְמֵנִי צַדִּיק חֶסֶד וְיוֹכִיחֵנִי שֶׁמֶן רֹאשׁ אַל יָנִי רֹאשִׁי כִּי עוֹד וּתְפִלָּתִי בְּרָעוֹתֵיהֶם". The textual difficulties posed by the entire verse become evident when translating it. One translation reads: "Let the righteous man strike me in loyalty, let him reprove me; let my head not refuse such choice oil. My prayers are still

against their evil deeds" (JPS 1985, 1276). Ignacio Carbajosa renders the verse thus: "The righteous one will strike me [with?] mercy and will rebuke me; the oil of the head my head will not reject [?], because still [?] and my prayer against their wicked-deeds" (2008, 262). Indeed, modern commentators have expressed their uncertainty in translation regarding this verse (JPS 1985, 1276; Berlin and Brettler 2004, 1439), some pointing to the unclear syntactic function and correct interpretation of the noun "חסד" (ḥesed; "mercy"? or "loyalty"?—Is it a direct object of the verb, or is it a modifier of the noun preceding it? Does it mean mercy or otherwise loyalty?). Additionally noted is the difficult construction "כי עוד ותפלתי" (ki ʿod u-təfilati, literally "because still and my prayer"?). Ignacio Carbajosa (2008, 263) notes that the Peshitta omits the adverb עוד ("still") to create the phrase "because my prayer". The Medieval French commentator Rashi reads the phrase as "for as long as my prayer", as if the text read "כי כל עוד". It should be noted that the noun שמן ראשי, "head oil", "choice oil", or "anointing oil" (see below) is also not clear, as evidenced by the various suggested translations above.

Our text clearly states that the dispute arose over the explanation of the phrase šemen roš ʾal yani roši, the question focusing almost certainly upon the definition of the verb yani. This verb had already been the subject of debate by early exegetes. Menaḥem ben Jacob ben Sruq (circa 910 – circa 970; Filipowski 1854, 121; Stern 1870, 88) is cited as having explained this verb to mean "to break". His literary opponent and critic Dunaš ben Labrat (circa 925 – circa 990) saw this verb as "to deny" or "to withhold" (Filipowski 1855, 21). Dunaš's opinion most likely originated from his Master, the great exegete, lexicographer, and halakhist R. Saadyah Gaʾon, who, in his *Tafsir Tehillim* (Judeo-Arabic translation and commentary to Psalms), translated this verse in this very fashion (Kafih 1966, 278). Before his death in 942, R. Saadyah had served as *Gaʾon* of the rival Suran

Academy in Baghdad, and while his literary works were composed close to a century prior to our episode, the close proximity of the two Academies as well as the popularity his works enjoyed allow us to posit that his position in this debate was at the very least known within the rival Pumbadithan Academy, even at such a late date. Further, we make note that the Aramaic *Targum* (translation tradition) to Psalms also sees the definition of the verb *yani* as "to cease", "to quit", or "to withhold" (משח רבות קודשא לא יבטל מן רישי, *mašaḥ rabot qodšaʾlo yiḇṭal min roši,* "sacred anointing oil shall not be withheld from my head"). While there is yet to be offered sufficient external evidence that this *Targum* was known in Baghdad at the time (Weitzman 1999, 208–209; Stec 2004, 1–2), its usage of the same tradition as the above exegetes is quite telling as to the popularity of the tradition. Additionally, the tradition "to quit" or "to withhold" was well-known among *Karaite* (Jews who do not accept the Rabbinic law as binding) exegetes as well, such as the North African-born Jerusalemite David ben Abraham Alfasi (circa 950) in his dictionary of Biblical lexemes, *Kitāb Jāmiʿ al-alfāẓ* (Skoss 1936, 7; Skoss 1945, 244–245), and his contemporary Yefet ben ʿAli (circa 900 – circa 980) in his commentary to Psalms, translating the problematic verse as follows (Ms Copenhagen 3): "choice oil should not be withheld from my head" (ודהן אלמאתפע לא ימנע ען ראסי, *wa-dahan al-mātfaʿ la yimnaʿ ʿan rāsi*). Thus, it seems highly likely that the same argument had been posed among the *Yeshiva's* students.

The debate changes the phrase from "anointing oil which shall not quit my head" to "[as] anointing oil [and thus] will not break my head". Either way, both views see this stich as reflective of the verse's previous one, "blows from the Righteous"/"the Righteous will strike me".

The Syriac Traditions

To better appreciate R. Hayya's usage of the Syriac tradition, it is important to compare the Patriarch's tradition with the known Peshitta text witnesses and then compare those findings with the Masoretic text.

The Patriarch's Syriac translation (as witnessed in Ms. Oxford Poc. 189, see below): *mšḥa d-ryšyʿa lo ʿady rešeh* ("the oil of the wicked shall not be upon his head") includes several important shifts from the Masoretic text. First, the Patriarch's tradition reads *šemen roš* ("head oil", fig. "anointing oil") as *mšḥa d-ryšʿa,* "oil of the wicked". This is concurrent with the majority of Peshitta manuscripts to this verse: ܡܫܚܐ ܕܪܫܝܥܐ ܠܪܝܫܝ ܠܐ ܢܕܗܢ, *mšḥa d-ryšʿa lryšy la ndhn* ("oil of the wicked will not anoint my head"), and is in line with the Septuagint's reading of the verse, too (Carbajosa 2008, 263). Second, both the Patriarch's tradition as well as the common Peshitta version see this stich as independent of the previous one ("blows from the Righteous"). Most important is the fact that both the Patriarch's tradition as well as the Peshitta replace the verb *yani* with another verb; the Patriarch has *ʿady*, which can be translated as "pass over" or "be upon", while the Peshitta reads *ndhn*, "anoint" (Leonhard 2001, 160; Carbajosa 2008, 263).

Although there is no mention of this in ibn ʿAqnin's account, it seems peculiar that upon hearing the Patriarch's reply R. Hayya Gaʾon offered no comment. The very cause for asking for the Patriarch's tradition, a definition of the verb *yani*, is sorely lacking in the response and thus ostensibly of little or no value to R. Hayya Gaʾon's and the Academy's debate. Moreover, since the Christian tradition reads "oil of the wicked" in place of the Masoretic "anointing oil", one would expect R. Hayya Gaʾon to have voiced a comment to that effect.

It may be suggested that R. Hayya Gaʾon did indeed comment after the fact, and perhaps R. Maṣliaḥ even mentioned this in his recount. However,

due to the nature of the citation's contextual use, i.e. the justification of using external sources, perhaps the Nagid or even ibn ʿAqnin truncated that part of the anecdote, as it does not serve their purposes. An unpublished Genizah fragment of R. Hayya Gaʾon's own work, presented below, might weigh in on this question. However, before turning our focus to this source and its contribution to the account a few final words regarding ibn ʿAqnin's text are in order.

The above analysis of ibn ʿAqnin's retelling is based upon Ms. JTS Lutzki 1056. However, as noted above, the Patriarch's tradition presented therein is based upon Ms. Oxford Poc. 189. This change is because the JTS manuscript reads a bit differently: משחא דרישא לא עדי רישה (*mšḥa d-ryšʿa la ʿady ryšh*, "head oil will not pass over his head"). Halkin (1964, 494–495) noted this in his critical apparatus but did not discuss its implications in his notes. Aaron Greenbaum (1978, 317) pointed to this variant reading, whose tradition is strikingly similar to that of the Masoretic one (on two points). Should this reading of the Patriarch's Syriac tradition prove authentic (casting doubt as to the provenance of the other version), it carries with it implications for Syriac and Christian Studies as well as our knowledge of the Baghdadi tradition of the Peshitta text. Michael Perry Weitzman has argued that preference be given to Peshitta manuscript Florence, Laurentian Library, Or. 58, or "9a1", whose unique readings are similar to the Masoretic tradition (1985, 225–258). In our verse, the Laurentine manuscript reads: ܘܡܫܚܐ ܠܪܝܫܝ ܢܕܗܢ, *wmšḥa l-ryšy ndhn*, "and oil will anoint my head" and is indeed quite similar to the Masoretic text "head oil will not quit my head". Ignacio Carbajosa (2008, 263–268) has convincingly argued that this reading is the original Syriac tradition, with all other manuscripts (even possible earlier ones) being merely emended texts based upon the Septuagint (LXX) tradition ("oil of the wicked shall not...", see above). The JTS manuscript's reading could then further strengthen Carbajosa's

argument, as this tradition was apparently known by the Patriarch in eleventh-century Baghdad.

The Christian Affinities within R. Hayya's Textual Heritage

It is thus fascinating to see that R. Hayya Gaʾon quotes the Syriac tradition to this verse in his *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* ("The Compendium"), a dictionary encompassing diverse Jewish material (Maman 2000, 344–345). R. Hayya's dictionary, sometimes translated as "The Comprehensive Book", is written in Judeo-Arabic with citations in Hebrew and Aramaic. The citations included in the entries run the gamut of Biblical and Rabbinic literature, with some entries defining words found in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (an eastern dialect of Aramaic employed in Jewish texts). Following an approach popular with contemporary Arabic lexicographers, the work follows an anagrammatic system. Entries are arranged alphabetically; each heading consisting of a two- or three-letter word under which are grouped all extant roots obtained by permutation of the heading's letters (Brody 1998, 330–331; Maman 1999).

In an unpublished Genizah fragment (Cambridge University Library, L-G Add. 2) of this work we find that R. Hayya Gaʾon made use of his knowledge of the Syriac tradition to this verse to elaborate upon the root *dhn*, (n. "oil", v. "to oil", "to anoint"). He writes thus: נקל אלי אלסריאניה שמן ראש אל יניא ראשי ימשחן דרשיעא לא ידהן, *nql ʾaly al-sryānyah šemen roš ʾal yani roši ymšḥan d-ryšyʿa la ydhn*, as copied in Syriac "head oil will not quit my head", "oil of the wicked will not anoint [me]".

Leaving aside previous anecdotal evidence (at the very best second-hand; R. Maṣliaḥ's account of R. Hayya's actions), we now face firsthand

literary evidence of R. Hayya Gaʾon's knowledge of the Syriac tradition to our verse. It would seem that R. Maṣliaḥ's mission bore fruit; the tradition with which he returned was incorporated within his master's encyclopedic work. However, when comparing the quote in R. Hayya Gaʾon's *Compendium* to the one in ibn ʿAqnin's account, a few differences become apparent. In the *Compendium*, the Syriac quote is *mšḥan d-rišyʿa la ydhn*, almost identical to the common Peshitta tradition (see above). As is to be expected, the quote calls the oil "oil of the wicked", thus sharing an affinity with the above-quoted Oxford manuscript (Ms. Oxford Pocock 189). On the other hand, the quote uses the verb *ydhn* (*ndhn*), as per the Peshitta, and not *la ʿady*, as in ibn ʿAqnin's account, in either the JTS (Lutzki 1056) or Oxford manuscripts.

This external evidence clearly witnesses R. Hayya Gaʾon's use of his knowledge of a Syriac tradition and seems to cast doubt upon the reading in the above-quoted ibn ʿAqnin's text (Ms. JTS Rab. 1056, which is most possibly a scribal emendation influenced by the Masoretic text and unlikely an omission of the ayin with a transposition of the yod), while reinforcing our knowledge of the Baghdadi Syriac tradition. What remains unclear is whether R. Hayya is quoting the Peshitta firsthand (and not the Patriarch), or whether this is the Patriarch's response and R. Maṣliaḥ's account is skewed.

More curious is R. Hayya Gaʾon's syntax in this fragment of his Compendium; he first writes that *dhn* is the same in "Nabatean" (*hu ʾydaʾ fi l-Nabaṭiya*, הו איצ'א פי אל נבטיה) and then offers the Psalms translation as אלסריאניה׳ (al-Suryāniyya). As this translation is the Peshitta tradition and in juxtaposition to "Nabatean", R. Hayya Gaʾon's Judeo-Arabic אלסריאניה׳ (al-Suryāniyya) should be read as "Syriac" (Maman 2000, 353–354). However, in Judeo-Arabic this term almost always means "Aramaic", either Biblical or Talmudic (Blau 2006, 295). The question then poses itself whether R. Hayya Gaʾon viewed the Syriac tradition as on par with Jewish

Targumim (Aramaic translations) and called it similarly. Or did he perhaps call the Peshitta by its rightful name, i.e. the "Syriac" tradition? Indeed, R. Hayya Gaʾon was fully aware that "Syriac" was the name of the language and script used by Christians in Iraq; he mentions this clearly in a response written to Kairouan no later than 1004 (Harkavy 1887, 230 no. 437). Further research of R. Hayya Gaʾon's writings may shed more light on this question and upon R. Hayya Gaʾon's appreciation for the Syriac tradition. What can be said with certainty is that R. Hayya Gaʾon made use of a foreign tradition, one that contradicts the Masoretic one on several counts, and despite this did not make any mention of the obvious discrepancies between the texts.

Besides the fascinating discovery that R. Hayya Gaʾon quotes the Syriac tradition as a proof-text in his work, and a newer appreciation for his doing so despite the differences in traditions, we are also privy to a further point of analysis: the dating of his *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī*. It seems reasonable that R. Hayya Gaʾon first became aware of this Syriac tradition to this verse only when this episode transpired. Had the reverse been the case, the Gaʾon's word, or work, should have been the deciding factor in the *Yeshiva's* debate, as we have seen previously in another debate. Thus we can postdate this text to that of our debate, using this anecdote to add to our knowledge of Gaonic literary activities.

It bears noting that our verse is cited in a lexicographic function in an additional entry in R. Hayya Gaʾon's aforementioned *Compendium*. In his commentary to Numbers (*Kitāb al-Tarjiyḥa*, Book of Arbitration), R. Judah ibn Balʿam (1000–1070) quotes R. Hayya Gaʾon's aforementioned *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* as defining the word *yani* as "to prevent" or "to cease" (exactly as did R. Saʿadyah Gaʾon and his student Dunaš; see above) and juxtaposes this word to other Hebrew words of a similar "root" (Perez 1970, 90). It goes without saying that in this entry, the Syriac tradition is not mentioned at

all, as it has, again, substituted a different verb (*dhn*, "annoint" or as in ibn 'Aqnin *la 'ady*, "will not pass") for the verb in question.

However, this bibliographic evidence towards dating *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* is also not absolute; as mentioned above, R. Maṣliaḥ related a similar incident where R. Hayya Ga'on weighed in on an exegetical debate, also in Psalms, by using a draft-copy (*masūda* in Judeo-Arabic) of his *Compendium* as a proof-text. Hence, at least part of the work was already in written form at the time of R. Maṣliaḥ's stay, and therefore our episode's input on the text is a later addition (perhaps localized to this entry alone).

In parallel to the paucity of data mentioned previously, so too are we not privy to the date of this event and thus in the dark as to which Patriarch was approached. Based upon correspondence between R. Maṣliaḥ and R. Hayya Ga'on, we could suggest a terminus ad quo of 1004 (when R. Hayya assumed the Gaonate, leadership of the Academy), more reasonably not before 1010, and a terminus ad quem of 1021. This date is based upon an *halakhic* responsum R. Maṣliaḥ received from R. Hayya Ga'on in 1022 (Ben Sasson 1991, 139), most likely after R. Maṣliaḥ's return home from his studies. Should this conjectured date be accurate, our incident took place well within the period when, according to Aubrey Vine (1937, 138), Mar Yuḥanna VI bar Nazuk (1013–1020) held office (Baum 2003, 172 dates Mar Yuḥanna 1012–1016).

However, the 1021 date proposed is itself not absolutely certain and we must consider the possibility of a later date, being certain only that the latest date could be April 1038, when R. Hayya Ga'on passed away. This allows for two additional possibilities, either Mar Isho'yahb IV (1021–1025) or Elias I (1028–1049) (Vine 1937, 138; Baum, 2003, 172). Since ecclesiastic history on the Patriarchs of this era is scanty, any further investigation and attempt to accurately date our episode will add a valuable facet to our knowledge of the Church of the East and its Patriarch's relationship

with the leader of the Baghdadi Jewish community (and the Mediterranean Diaspora).

A Note on Languages and Scholarly Communication

A further point of inquiry into the episode, not taken into account by previous literature, bears noting. Extant sources suggest that at the time of our account, the fluency of the common Christian in Syriac had largely diminished in favor of Arabic (Vollandt 2015, 33). It may be suggested that with it, the ability to read Estrangela (classical Syriac script) had also declined. Perhaps R. Hayya Ga'on trusted only the Patriarch to provide an accurate reading, or perhaps the texts in need were only available to the Patriarch and not to the lay individual. In this case, R. Hayya Ga'on's seeming reliance upon the Patriarch must be tempered (contra earlier studies, see above); the authority for the tradition lies not with the Patriarch but with the text in his care. Should this indeed be the case, we have again seemingly uncovered a hint towards R. Hayya Ga'on's appreciation for the Syriac tradition, the Peshitta (perhaps based upon the various Syriac traditions which attribute to it a Jewish provenance), an appreciation which to date has yet to be systematically explored. It may be suggested that given the various traditions for the origins of the Peshitta, which base themselves largely upon a Jewish source (Dirksen 1988, 255), it is not impossible that R. Hayya Ga'on, too, saw this Aramaic *Targum* as an originally Jewish one, and not necessarily representative exclusively of the Christian tradition.

More curious is the fact that of all the members in the Academy present during the debate, R. Hayya Ga'on chose the foreign student as his emissary and not a local one. Arguably, ample *Yeshiva* and *Beit Din*

(legal court) officers were at R. Hayya Ga'on's disposal and could equally have served as messenger, not to mention sending a local student. While the choice was very likely a didactic one, exposing the new student to the internal workings of the Academy as well as Jewish-Baghdadi society, a formal issue presents itself. Ostensibly, R. Maṣliaḥ spoke a different dialect of Arabic (Western or Maghrebi, if not Siculo-Arabic; Agius 2010, 111–112; Metcalfe 2011) than the local Baghdadi one. Thus his appointment as messenger might propose that the two leaders, R. Hayya Ga'on and the Patriarch, shared a familiarity which dispensed with formalities such as a possible language barrier or a sense of slight at being queried by a foreigner. This familiarity between the two dignitaries suggests a much closer tie than previously assumed.

It is however, not entirely impossible that R. Maṣliaḥ, as a seasoned traveler and scholar-merchant, was fluent in other dialects as well. On the other hand, Ronny Volandt (2015, 31) notes that many Patriarchs had an inadequate knowledge of Arabic and it is highly possible that the Patriarch in our account had a poor command of the language. Thus, even in the event that R. Maṣliaḥ was fluent in Baghdadi Arabic, we cannot rule out that the Patriarch was not (preferring Syriac), and a language barrier might still have existed. This possibility of a language barrier between messenger and addressee (and the disregard for such) serves to strengthen our proposal of a hitherto explored familiarity between the two dignitaries; R. Hayya Ga'on's relationship with his Christian counterpart was such that he felt no compunction in sending his query with a foreign student instead of a local.

The Cultural Backgrounds of Jews in Baghdad as Opposed to Sicily

The next point in our analysis of this account is R. Maṣliaḥ's reaction to his master's mission. Interestingly, the literature dealing with the episode has placed little or no emphasis upon R. Maṣliaḥ's home culture, and certainly not in juxtaposition to the cultural setting enjoyed by the *Yeshiva* in Baghdad.

David Sklare (1996, 99–101) follows Joel Kraemer (1986) in characterizing the period during the tenth and first half of the eleventh centuries as one of "renaissance" in Islam. At the time, Baghdad had become a center for the study and translation of Greek philosophical and scientific works. Scholars, scribes, teachers, booksellers, and merchants formed a humanistic culture featuring a love for mankind or humanness, along with conceptions of common kinship and the unity of mankind. The prevailing humanistic atmosphere in cosmopolitan Baghdad allowed for (and oftentimes outright encouraged) interaction between faiths, contacts which oftentimes developed into friendships.

Public contacts of this sort were mainly found at *majālis* (sing. *majlis*), meetings in which scholars and other intellectuals gathered to discuss topics of mutual interest (Sklare 1996, 100). Meetings were conducted in settings like bookstores, shops, markets, and even bathhouses (Kraemer 1986, 57). Many of the bookstores were located in the *Ṭāq al-Ḥarrānī* (the Harrani Archway), which bordered on the *Al-ʿAṭīqa* Quarter where a large Jewish community was situated (Kraemer 1986, 57, 78). The Pumbadithan Academy transferred to Baghdad at the close of the ninth century (circa 890) with its sister Academy, Sura, moving there approximately a century later (circa 987; Sklare 1996 71–72; Brody 1998, 36). Importantly for our discussion, R. Sherira Gaʾon's court was located in the *Al-ʿAṭīqa* Quarter

(Sklare 1998, 72). There is no indication that R. Sherira's son, R. Hayya, had relocated in the years between his father's reign and his own, and it is fairly safe to assume R. Hayya presided over his court at the same location.

Other, more formal sessions, which were usually for the purpose of debate, were held at the courts of local officials (Kramer 1986, 58; Sklare 1996, 100–101). Although most of the evidence of Jewish participation in formal, debate-oriented *majālis* provided by the above sources is from the tenth century, the *zeitgeist* was such that it is reasonable to assume that such contacts continued even during the first half of the eleventh century, when our episode transpired, especially in light of the close proximity between the nexus of humanistic meetings in the many bookstores in the Harrani Archway and the *Al-ʿAṭīqa* Quarter where R. Hayya resided.

Thus our surprise should not necessarily be focused upon R. Hayya Gaʾon's willingness to request a Scriptural translation from a member of another faith; considering the humanistic culture permeating Baghdad for over a century, this is almost to be expected. In fact, R. Hayya Gaʾon made use of non-Jewish literature in his responsa and commentaries (Halkin 1975, 227; Brody 1999, 299; Sklare 1996, 52, 74) as well as in his *Compendium* and was not remiss from inquiring lexical information from others (as he himself stated in his defense of sending R. Maṣliaḥ to the Patriarch; Maman 2000, 368–369).

Rather, we propose that the focus of inquiry should be upon R. Maṣliaḥ's account to the Nagid of his own indignation. It seems fairly safe to assume from this display that relations between Jews and Christians in eleventh-century Sicily were in no way as open as in Baghdad. This may have been due to a predominately Eastern Orthodox (Byzantine) Christian population, the proximity to Roman Catholic Italy, a different cultural milieu, or a combination of these factors (Simonsohn 2011, 12–15). What is clear is that

what can be expected of a Baghdadi Jew living in a 'cosmopolitan' cultural setting is not to be assumed of a Sicilian Jew.

The Textual History of Debates on Non-Jewish Scholarship

The final point in our analysis of the account is R. Maṣliaḥ's account of R. Hayya Ga'on's rather lengthy rebuke. The account is a quote from the Nagid's dictionary, originating from a missive containing a biography of R. Hayya sent by R. Maṣliaḥ to the Nagid. Despite the Hagid's dictionary having been lost, its appearance in booklists found in the Cairo Genizah (Allony 2006, 31, 257, 265, 287–8) testifies to its popularity. While we have noted minor edits by ibn 'Aqnin, it is safe to assume he would not have made major changes in so popular a text.

R. Hayya Ga'on offers various and, upon careful examination, apparently independent reasons: 1) his predecessors and forefathers had done so; 2) the queries were limited to philological and exegetical ones; 3) such queries could also even be posed to the lowest strata of society; and 4) "as is well known and has been passed down" (seemingly in addition to invoking his forebears). The following careful analysis of the above leads us to the conclusion that R. Hayya Ga'on offered several rationales for this praxis more in order to calm his student than as his own reasoning.

Each reason offered possesses stand-alone value. As a jurist and a *Halakhic* authority, R. Hayya Ga'on was wont to enlist his forbearers' opinions and stances in his Talmud commentaries and Responsa, relying upon them whole-heartedly (Dubovick 2015, 222–223). Testimony of their actions alone should have served as reason enough for R. Hayya Ga'on. The mention of a limitation to lexicographic and philological queries seems

almost extraneous within the *Yeshiva* setting, almost as if this limitation could serve in itself as reason enough to permit querying members of another faith. Despite the *Halakhic* repercussions such lexical inquiries might bear, the limit posted by R. Hayya Ga'on implies a prohibition of (or at least an aversion to) inquiry regarding theological questions, thus placing a damper on the issue; the topic is merely a benign one and therefore one may ask such questions, even though questions in other areas were to be seen as taboo.

In the same fashion, one wonders at the third statement; the permissibility to query members of other faiths is not limited to those knowledgeable but permitted even of those in the lowest strata of society. R. Hayya Ga'on, Talmudist first and foremost, almost assuredly had in mind the Rabbinic appraisal of these two professions, shepherds and cow-hands; throughout the Talmudic literature they are held almost in utter infamy. Thus we find remarks such as (Tosefta Bava Metzia 2:33,[4] parallels in Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 13b,[5] 26a and Sanhedrin 57a[6]): "Gentiles, shepherds and their breeders are not raised [from a pit, i.e. assisted] nor lowered [i.e. endangered]"; R. Dosa ben Hyrcanus' belittlement of R. Akivah, "You have not yet achieved [the status] of a cowhand" along with R. Akivah's humble concurrence, "not even that of a shepherd"[7] (Babylonian Talmud Yevamoth 16a, similarly R. Yoḥanan's retort in Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 26a[8]); the Mishnah's choice as the epitome of non-Jurist material

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4   Ed. Lieberman 2001, 72: "הגוים והרועים בהמה דקה ומגדליה לא מעלין ולא מורידין המינין והמשומדין והמסורות מורידין."

5   Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Suppl. Heb. 1337: "הגוים והרועים בהמה דקה לא מעלין ולא מורידין."

6   Venice print 1520–1523: "והתניא גוים ורועי בהמה דקה לא מעלין ולא מורידין."

7   Wilno 1846: "ועדיין לא הגעת לרועי בקר אמר לו רבי עקיבא ואפילו לרועי צאן."

8   Wilno 1846: "כי אתו לקמיה דרבי יוחנן אמרו ליה קרי לן רועי בקר ולא אמר ליה מר ולא מידי אמר להו." Compare Cambridge University Library, Genizah Fragment "ואי קרי לכו רועי צאן מאי אמינא ליה.

"I accept three cowhands [as Judges]" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 3:2)[9] through the Talmud's outright negation of livestock-herders as Judges (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 25b).[10] In other words, questions of this sort are almost to be considered so trivial as to be non-influential, that whoever may provide an answer may then be taken seriously. This view, then, is not necessarily dependent upon R. Hayya Gaʾon's forebears having done so, but rather upon a line of reasoning grounded in the *Halakhic* world.

Finally, R. Hayya Gaʾon informs his student that this praxis is a well-known one, knowledge of it being passed down publicly from generation to generation, and not necessarily a Geonic family tradition to which R. Hayya Gaʾon alone was privy. In the first argument of his rebuke, R. Hayya Gaʾon takes into account his student's foreign background and ignorance of common Baghdadi custom. In this final phase he rebukes him for his ignorance of a supposedly well-known practice not limited to the Geonic hierarchy.

Contrarily, it is quite telling that in his rebuke R. Hayya Gaʾon made no mention of Talmudic dictums involving gleaning information from members of other faiths, such as R. Yoḥanan's comment "anyone who speaks wisdom, even from among the Nations, is hailed as 'wise one'" (Babylonian Talmud Megillah 16a),[11] as proof of his custom. R. Maṣliaḥ was an accomplished Torah scholar and ought to have readily accepted a Talmud quote as basis for the practice.

This abundance of *ratios* would seem to point to a more protracted debate between Master and student than otherwise displayed in the

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כי אתו לקמיה דר' יוחנן אמרי ליה קרו לן קמך רועי בקר ולא מחית בה[ו] א' להו אי הוו" :T-S F 2(1).173
".קרו לכו רועי צאן נמי לא אמרי להו ולא מידי

9   Wilno 1846: "נאמנין עלי שלשה רועי בקר".

10   "אמר רבא רועה שאמרו אחד רועה בהמה דקה ואחד רועה בהמה גסה".

11   "אמר רבי יוחנן כל האומר דבר חכמה אפיל באומות העולם נקרא חכם".

text before us (perhaps R. Maṣliaḥ having truncated the discussion in his presentation to the Nagid). Perhaps R. Hayya Gaʾon's acceptance of his forebears' practice was not equally appreciated by R. Maṣliaḥ, whose allegiances might not necessarily lie completely with the Babylonian Academies. This might explain a need for R. Hayya Gaʾon's limitation of the praxis to 'mere' lexical issues. By adding the further clarification of "shepherds and cowhands", the issue of approaching a foreign cleric has thus been effectively defused, seemingly added to allay any doubts left in the rebuked student's mind. By proclaiming the practice to be well-known among the populace, in one statement R. Hayya Gaʾon sealed the case for Babylonian primacy in *Halakhic* rulings while simultaneously demoting the Mediterranean Diaspora, learned as it may have been to a secondary position, seeing them as "out of the loop".

Conclusion

In conclusion, a careful study of the individual factors in this well-known incident, especially when viewed within a broader perspective of different cultures, sheds new light upon several facets of Jewish-Christian relationships, both in Baghdad as well as (inadvertently) in Sicily.

Thus, while R. Maṣliaḥ is a fellow Jew and a Talmud scholar in his own right, in his own account he presents himself as uninformed regarding the intricate relations between the Jewish scholars in Baghdad and their Christian counterparts. R. Hayya Gaʾon rebukes him for his reluctance to consult the Christian Patriarch, all the while reassuring him of Jewish autonomy in the issue with the argument that on some matters Jews may without qualm consult even livestock-herders (let alone a non-Jewish scholar and religious authority). The incident impressed R. Maṣliaḥ enough

to include it in his biography of R. Hayya Ga'on, thereby preserving the messages transmitted for posterity.

The incident is also significant for the history of Jewish-Christian textual exchange, as portrayed by the textual analysis of the various translations and commentaries in Aramaic and Syriac related to the Psalms verse in question. Therefore, the close reading of the anecdote adds to our knowledge of the Eastern Patriarchy in the eleventh century while posing new venues for research in these fields.

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The Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Sermons of R. Shaul Serero of Fes (1566–1655)

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The Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Sermons of R. Shaul Serero of Fes (1566–1655)

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ABSTRACT   R. Shaul Serero (1566–1655) served as the chief rabbi of Fes during the first half of the seventeenth century. Serero repeatedly devoted his annual sermons on the Sabbath preceding Passover to clarifying various aspects of the concept of redemption, one of the main subjects of the Jewish-Christian polemic. A review of these sermons reveals that Serero found it necessary to examine and refute the Christian dogma on three separate occasions on the Sabbath before Passover, in 1603, 1607, and 1611. Serero adopted and applied arguments from the traditional Sephardic polemics literature but adapted, edited, and expanded these arguments to shape the most appropriate argument.

KEY WORDS   R. Shaul Serero; Fes; Morocco; seventeenth century; Jewish-Christian Disputation; polemics literature; Jewish philosophy; sermons

Preface

Medieval Jewish anti-Christian polemical essays written in Christian countries served, inter alia, as a defense against missionary activity.[1] In Spain, for example, the Jewish-Christian debate was a large part of Jewish

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1   Much research literature has been devoted to the Jewish-Christian debate. Some of this literature will be mentioned in its relevant context within this paper.

life,[2] which resulted in an abundance of anti-Christian literature.[3] After the expulsion from Spain in 1492, the ex-conversos continued to compose anti-Christian polemical literature in the Christian countries where they had found refuge in order to refute the claims of Christians who tried to prevent them from returning to Judaism (Cooperman 1987; Melnick 1981; Kaplan 1980, 1982, 204–229).

The situation was somewhat different in Islamic countries. Although Christianity was not a threat in the full sense of the term as in Christian countries, the presence of a Christian minority that had existed in Islamic countries from the early days of the Middle Ages and diplomatic and commercial ties between Islamic countries and Christian countries that had deepened over the years led to the fact that the Jews in Islamic countries had to deal with Christianity as well.[4] This can be seen from the anti-Christian polemic literature composed by Jews from Muslim countries (Lasker 1990; Stroumsa 1997), such as an essay by Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammiṣ (Stroumsa 1989), and the anonymous *Account of the Disputation of the Priest*, known in Hebrew as *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (Lasker and Stroumsa 1996). Other Jewish authors in Islamic countries

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2   Besides the famous public disputations between official representatives of both religions that took place in Barcelona (1263) and Tortosa (1413-1414), other unofficial and sometimes spontaneous polemical debates involving quasi-educated and 'simple' folk, such as The Majorca Disputation (1286), took place as well (Limor 2003, 2010; Ben Shalom 2003).

3   Such as: Nahman (1963); Profiat Duran (1981a+b); Ben Zemah Duran (1975); Crescas (2002)

4   In fact, some of the members of the Moroccan Jewish community in the seventeenth century, namely in the geographical area and the time period to which this research is devoted, had very significant diplomatic and commercial relations with Christian countries such as Spain, Portugal, Holland, and England. They travelled between these countries in their official roles, cultivating relationships, and some even chose to convert to Christianity in order to improve their chances of success (Garcia-Arenal and Wiegers 2003, 14-20, 32-52).

argued against Christian doctrine in the course of their discussions of related theological issues such as God's unity or the eternity of the Torah. This approach is frequently found in the philosophical and exegetical works by R. Saʿadia Gaʾon (Wolfson 1975, 1997; Lasker 1994). Many others, such as R. Judah Halevi (Schwartz 1994; Lasker 1990) and Maimonides (Lasker 2010), polemicized against Christianity only incidentally.

In other words, despite the fact that Jews in Islamic countries were less threatened by Christian missionary activity, they still felt a need to respond to Christian doctrines on theological grounds and included not only anti-Christian passages in their works but also composed complete polemical treatises.

Research on the Jewish-Christian disputations in Morocco, including on Jewish anti-Christian writings, is extremely sparse.[5] In this paper, I would like to shed more light upon the Jewish-Christian polemic in Morocco and show how it continued until the end of medieval times and the beginning of the Early Modern period.[6]

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5   Two main occurrences pertaining to the Jewish-Christian disputation in Morocco are mentioned in research. The first is the disputation that took place in the city of Ceuta in 1179, where the protagonist was a merchant named Guglielmo Alfachino (Limor 1994). The second is the "Marrakesh Dialogues", an anti-Christian text written in Spanish depicting the protracted oral dispute between a friar and a Jewish proselyte. Wilke identified the anonymous author as Estevao Dias, a Portuguese New-Christian who returned to Judaism. Dias penned the first draft of the essay in Marrakesh in or around 1581 and completed it in Antwerp in 1583 (Wilke 2014). On the role of first-person narratives in the discourse of religious polemics, see Szpiech (2013).

6   Research literature disagrees whether the term "Early Modern Period" can be applied to Jewish history; namely, whether the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are indeed unique in Jewish history. There are those who maintain that unique, significant changes occurred among Jewish People and therefore the period should be defined as a new era, the Early Modern Period. Others claim that the changes during the era were minor and not revolutionary, and therefore do not merit a definition or name different to the period preceding them (Hacker 2015). It is not my intention to come to any conclusion on the issue concerning the Moroccan Jewish community, but it should be noted that some

After the expulsion from Spain in 1492, between twenty and forty thousand exiles arrived in the Maghreb. Most of them chose to dwell in Morocco rather than in other Maghreb countries; some stayed a short time only (Abitbol 1992). The exiles settled all over the country with a large proportion settling in Fes, which was then the main city both politically and financially, and were favorably received by the sultan, Mulay Muhammad al-Shaykh (Ben Shlomo 1979).

The exiles, known as the Sephardim (from the Hebrew word *Səfarad*, meaning Spain), fast became acclimatized but founded communities separate from the local Jews, the *tošavim* (Corcos 1977; Bentov 1986). Over the years, the Sephardim became the dominant community and forced their customs upon the original residents.[7]

R. Shaul Serero (1566–1655), a descendant of Jews expelled from Spain who chose to resettle in Fes, served as the community rabbi during the first half of the seventeenth century (Ohana 2014). In this study, I will examine how he turned to anti-Christian polemic writing, as did his ancestors before him and his peers in Christian countries.[8]

As part of his role as Chief Rabbi, Serero delivered sermons on the Sabbath, holy days, and special occasions.[9] His sermons were subsequently published (Serero 1989). A study of Serero's sermons shows that he found it necessary to discuss and refute Christian dogma on three separate occasions on *Šabbat ha-Gadol*, the Sabbath before Passover, in 1603,

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scholars of Morocco recognize the beginnings of the modern era in Morocco in the last third of the sixteenth century, as implied by Garcia-Arenal (2008).

7   Yet not without conflict with the *tošavim*, who wished to preserve their traditions (Gerber 1980, 113-120).

8   The present research is a deeper and broader study of a chapter in my PhD thesis dealing with Jewish-Christian polemics in Serero's sermons (Ohana 2014, 246-251).

9   About the role of the sermon in Jewish communities, see Saperstein (1989), Horowitz (1992), Dan (1996), Regev (2010, 9-38).

1607, and 1611. Due to their closeness to Passover—the Jewish Festival of Redemption—the sermons delivered by Serero at this time of year were always devoted to the subject of redemption, which was one of the main issues in the Jewish-Christian disputation.[10]

Likewise, it may be suggested that Serero deemed it correct to argue with the fundementals of Christianity around Passover due to its proximity to Easter, the Christian festival commemorating Jesus' resurrection, a time of rivalry and tension between the two religions.[11]

On the first occasion, in 1603, Serero noted that he felt the need to discuss a certain viewpoint concerning belief in redemption due to an argument posed by a Christian. From here it can be deduced that a religious debate actually occurred. On the other two occasions, in 1607 and 1611, Serero did not state explicitly whether there had been any discussion with a Christian, and it is very possible that in these instances his polemics against Christianity were purely theological and theoretically based.

Therefore, it seems that Serero felt the need to refute Christian dogma both on the grounds of an actual disputation that had taken place in Fes, and on the grounds of the general theological-theoretical perspective that was characteristic of many medieval rabbis in Muslim countries.

Before examining these three cases, I would like to draw attention to an extraordinary event, a public debate between Jews and Christians which

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10   With special reference to the question of the Messiah's identity (Lasker 1999).

11   Yuval suggests that the content of the Passover Haggadah evolved while attempting to address the challenges posed by the Christian interpretation of the holiday: the compilers made a conscious effort to emphasize the validity of the Jewish interpretation while rejecting its alternative Christian explanation (Yuval 1996). It should also be noted that in the New Testament the Sabbath after the crucifixion, i.e. the Sabbath after Passover, was *Šabat ha-Gadol*. In fact, notes Yuval, even according to Jewish tradition *Šabat ha-Gadol* had been observed on the Sabbath after Passover and was only later changed to the Sabbath preceding the holiday (Yuval 1994).

took place in Fes twenty years before Serero began to serve as Chief Rabbi. It can be assumed that Serero, who was not yet serving in any official position but was part of the city's rabbinic cadre was somewhat affected by the debate.

The Jewish Community in Fes and Portuguese Captives

During the fifteenth century, Portugal occupied parts of coastal Morocco and established several fortified outposts along the Moroccan Atlantic coast. Consequently, the 1530s and the 1540s saw an increase in missionary activity, and religious debates between Franciscan and Jesuit monks and the Jews of Fes, Tetuán and Ceuta took place (Hirschberg 1965, 324; Bashan 1980, 60; Huss 2000, 6–7).

In 1578, King Don Sebastian of Portugal embarked on an unsuccessful crusade after Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad II, the deposed Moroccan Sultan, asked him to help recover his throne.[12] Don Sebastian was accompanied by Jeronimo de Mendonca, a Portuguese chronicler. De Mendonca was taken prisoner by the Moroccan army together with Portuguese soldiers and officers. Upon his release and his return to his homeland, he described the hardships of war and his days of captivity in Fes (de Mendonca 1607).[13]

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12   In the Battle of al-Qaṣr al-Kabīr, the Portuguese army suffered an overwhelming defeat, King Sebastian lost his life, and Portugal lost its independence for sixty years. Two contenders for the Moroccan crown, Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad II and Mulay ʿAbd al-Mālik, also lost their lives. Hence the event became known as the "Battle of the Three Kings", and Aḥmad al-Manṣūr became the king of Morocco (Yahya 1981, 66-91; Garcia-Arenal 2008, 6-39).

13   For de Mendonca's description of the Jewish community in Fes, see Lipiner (1982).

As part of their incarceration, de Mendonca and the other captives were sent by the Moroccan authorities to stay in the Mellah, the Jewish quarter of Fes.[14] De Mendonca devoted several pages to describing the mostly positive care that the captives received from the local Jews who were themselves descendants of Spanish refugees: "They [the Portuguese captives] find cure and comfort, as they received very humane treatment from their [Jewish] masters, in addition to the great relief they felt, due to the language usually spoken by the Jews, Castilian" (de Mendonca 1607, vol. 2, 41).[15] De Mendonca also noted the kindness of the Jewish women, "their gentleness and compassion towards the prisoners, that I was witness to in many cases, and the help that they gave during hours of crisis and sickness" (ibid.).[16]

Ironically, the Portuguese captives sought to thank the Jews who had treated them so well by trying to redeem their souls through missionary activity.[17] De Mendonca describes the sermons delivered by a priest, Vicente da Fonseca, and the positive reactions that they elicited from the Jews:

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14   The Jewish quarter was the area designated to receive all non-Muslim visitors to the city, including Christian travelers, ambassadors, commercial agents, and captives (Garcia-Arenal 2009, 71).

15   All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated. I would like to thank Mr. Daniel Safran for his kind help in translating the passages from the original Portuguese texts.

16   A description of this sort of kindness was also mentioned by R. Immanuel Aboab, "Those miserables could not find a greater comfort than being sold to the Jews [of Fes] as slaves, as they knew their natural piety" (Aboab 1629, 308).

17   From its outset, the aim of the Portuguese conquest was missionary and the Jews of Morocco were aware of this. Therefore the date of Don Sebastian's defeat and Morocco's victory, together with the Jewish community's salvation from possible destruction, was designated as a holiday for all future generations. This holiday has since been known as *Purim de los Christianos* (Nizri 2014, chapter 3). In Jewish communities in the Diaspora it is customary to establish special holidays to commemorate a miracle of salvation and to call them Purim.

> He quoted [in his sermons] the Holy Scripture and the words of the prophets... as they appear in Hebrew. About twenty or thirty rabbis attended his gatherings ... which were held at Don Francisco Portugal [residence]... who was staying in the Jewish quarter... Vicente delivered many sermons during our short stay in Fes, causing many Jews to abandon their religion and convert to Christianity. (de Mendonca, vol. 2, 40) [18]

According to de Mendonca, most of da Fonseca's activities were devoted to "confusing the Jews", therefore he quoted in Hebrew from the Bible. His ability to quote in Hebrew was neither unusual nor surprising, since knowledge of Hebrew among Christian scholars was common from the Renaissance of the twelfth century onward and was part of the Christian Hebraism which sought knowledge of ancient and foreign languages (Benson and Constable 1982, XXIX–XXX). Moreover, during the thirteenth century schools for the study of Arabic and Hebrew were established in some Spanish cities by Mendicant monks so that their graduates could serve as missionaries and preachers in North Africa and Spain (Bischoff 1961).

If de Mendonca's description precisely reflects the priest's arguments without adding nor subtracting from them, it should be noted that da Fonseca quoted only from the Bible and did not deliberate through quotes from the Talmud; this was an early method of deliberation. The twelfth century brought a change in the modes of debate, which until then had concentrated only on biblical texts; Christian scholars now began to familiarize themselves with another holy text, one that pertained to the Jewish way of life, the Talmud. From this time onwards, religious debate revolved around post-biblical literature (Funkenstein 1993). This trend

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18   Many of the unofficial disputations took place in private homes (Ben-Shalom 2003).

increased during the thirteenth century together with the Mendicant teachings that called to approximate the body of knowledge in post-biblical literature and in the original language (Cohen 1982, 1999; Chazan 1989).

De Mendonca noted that the Jews fulfilled their duty of politely listening to the priest, and with the conclusion of the sermon the rabbi of the community responded to his arguments. According to his account the rabbi repeated some of the arguments in a more moderate version, thus infuriating some of the Jews who called him a Christian. From de Mendonca's account it can be seen that there were members of the audience who had wanted to answer the priest and even posed their own difficult questions, but the priest refrained from answering them in order not to be drawn into an uproar and referred only to remarks made by the Chief Rabbi.

Although de Mendonca's descriptions are biased and unobjective, even a minimal interpretation of his report still testifies to the existence of dialogue—even a profound theological debate—between Christians and Jews in the last third of the sixteenth century.[19] This was a debate through which Christians sought to proselytize, even without any means of coercion, while Jews sought to refute Christianity and prove the basis of their Jewish belief.

It should be noted that in a chronicle written by R. Samuel Ibn Danan III during the same period, he described the defeat of the Portuguese King and the relief felt by the Moroccan Jews but did not mention interfaith debates between the Jews and the Portuguese prisoners.[20]

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19   The presence of Portugese captives in Marrakesh, and the decision of some of them to stay there even after their release, brought on the awakening of a religious debate there as well. Those debates are the historical and social background of the "Marrakesh Dialogues" (Wilke 2014, 42–52).

20   After settling in Fes following the expulsion from Spain, members of the Ibn Danan family had a custom where they would write the chronicles of their times and commanded the following generations to continue the practice. R. Shmuel ibn Danan IV collected the

As already mentioned, Serero did not hold any official position at the time and the event is not mentioned post-factum in any of his sermons or his historical chronicles, but it can be assumed that the disputation was familiar to him.

Three Cases of *Šabat ha-Gadol* Sermons

Episode I: *Šabat ha-Gadol* Sermon of 1603

Twenty years later, at the onset of the seventeenth century, Serero was appointed Chief Rabbi of the community. By that time the Portuguese captives were no longer a threat, since they had already returned to their homeland. Now the Jewish-Christian debate in Fes revealed itself anew when a Jew who had converted to Christianity[21] questioned the fundamental tenets of the Jewish faith.[22]

In his *Šabat ha-Gadol* sermon in 1603, Serero mentioned that two weeks previously he had debated with a Christian: "Fifteen days previous to this sermon, I was part of a debate with a Christian of our seed, and I

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various chronicles, including that of R. ibn Danan III, and compiled a single collection. This collection was later published in a critical edition (Benayahu 1993).

21 Throughout the sixteenth century many New Christians – formerly Jews and Muslims – chose to settle in North Africa in the hope of escaping from the eyes of the Church and returning to their original religions (Hirschberg 1965, 322-324; Beinart 1998, 855-868; Garcia-Arenal and Wiegers 2003, 39-41).

22 During the Middle Ages it was common for Jewish apostates to participate in Jewish-Christian disputations and even lead them (Cohen, 1987). Yet as mentioned above, most of the New Christians in Fes returned to their roots, and thus positive, mutual relationships were formed between the Jews of Fes and the ex-conversos.

have prepared this sermon about what he asked me and what I answered him" (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 113).[23]

The Christian raised two arguments against the Jewish belief of redemption: a) regarding the length of the exile: the prolonged duration of the exile discouraging the expectation of salvation; b) regarding the quality of the exile: the dispersion of the Jewish People in many lands is even more hopeless. According to the apostate, if the Jewish People had all been exiled to one place, a gradual amassing of strength and cooperation could possibly lead to the success of a natural national uprising, but the dispersion among nations the world overnegates such a possibility.

Indeed, the continuing Jewish exile had been an ongoing subject in Christian debate since the time of Aurelius Augustinus (354–430), who held that the Jewish exile was proof of the truth of Christianity. This claim was typical of the historical arguments used in religious debates since reality was considered ordained by God.[24] The Christians claimed that the Jewish exile proved that God transferred his choice from "Israel of the flesh" to "Israel Spiritualis". In other words, the Jews' existence as a despised, humiliated minority is allegedly evidence both of their mistake and of God's rejection and at the same time validates Christianity.

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23   The terminology used by Serero „Christian from our seed" can be interpreted in two senses: as a direct convert or as a converso. In any event, it should be noted that throughout his sermon, Serero calls him "Christian" and not "Jewish convert": "These are the words of the Christian", "And this is what the Christian claimed", "And thus we have explained the two allegations that the Christian brought as proof", "And this was my answer to the Christian".

24   However, it should be noted that Lasker claims that historical allegations were not extremely forceful—compared with exegetical and rational arguments—since both sides interpreted what they perceived in accordance with their preconceived doctrines (Lasker 1977, 7-9), as indeed did Serero (see below).

Moreover, the matter of exile was one that touched the core of medieval Jewry and was an issue with which Jews wrestled between themselves, irrespective of their debates with Christians.[25]

In the above-mentioned case, the question was not the classic difficulty of the "length of exile", since the Christian did not claim that the Jews' exile was proof of their mistake or of God's abandoning them, nor did he wonder why their punishment (the exile) was so long. The apostate claimed that such a long exile and the wide dispersion of the Jewish People were the cause of Jews' despair concerning their redemption. In other words, the characteristics of the exile are the cause of doubt with reference to the probability of redemption.

Therefore, if this Christian was a direct convert it would seem that his Jewish past enabled him to pinpoint the concerns of Jews living at the end of the Middle Ages and perhaps reflected his innermost thoughts; but if he was a converso it is possible that the continuing exile, and perhaps the difficult circumstances of the Jews in Fes from the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century,[26] deterred him from returning to Judaism despite his original intention to do so when he left Spain or Portugal.[27]

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25   Rosenberg points out eight explanations clarifying the reasons for the Jews' dispersion: a) a punishment; b) representing the „messianic birth-pangs"; c) the Land of Israel's "vomiting" the sinners who dwell within (Leviticus 18:28); d) the consequence of certain astrological conditions; e) a mission; f) a „Tiqun" (from a Kabbalistic aspect); g) the result of the fundamental ontological structure of the world; h) sin (Rosenberg 1983).

26   For details about the difficult circumstances that prevailed in Fes during those years, see Garcia-Arenal and Wiegers (2003, 27-32); Serero (1989, vol. 1,128, 155: vol. 2, 46, 189); Benayahu (1993, 71-90). Serero notes the difficulties facing the community: repeated wars, heavy taxes, famine, and the dangers lurking on highways. As a result, he states, some even chose to convert to Islam. Regarding the history of Moroccan Jews converting to Islam, see Garcia-Arenal (1987).

27   In a sermon two years previously, in 1601, Serero noted that Jews who had converted to Christianity immigrated to Fes in order to return to Judaism, but once they realized the

Serero shared (with his congregants and his future readers) the method that he thought most correct to answer the apostate's claims. He noted that he did not think it fitting to answer that the future redemption would be supernatural, and therefore natural or geopolitical difficulties would not prevent its occurrence.[28] He noted that he had decided to answer the Christian in the same manner: demonstrating that the length and quality of the exile are actually proof of God's providence and therefore reinforce Jewish belief in the redemption (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 113).

This type of argument was common among medieval debaters: the speaker would accept his opponent's basic premise and then prove the weakness of his arguments (Talmge 1981, XVI).

Serero claimed that the extended exile proved God's providence from two angles:

a) The actual existence of the Jewish People, despite their long exile and suffering, is evidence of providence since the Jews would otherwise have been eradicated long ago. This argument was also often used by Jews among themselves to explain the length of their exile (Rosenberg 1983, 404). Serero referred to Talmudic sages (in BT, Sota 9a) who claimed that the exile is ongoing since God, in his infinite mercy and providence, does not punish the Jewish People at one time but extends the retribution throughout the generations.

b) In spite of the length of the exile, the Jewish People remain strong in their belief of God, and perhaps even grew stronger; if not for Divine Providence, it would be impossible for humans to continue to believe throughout such a long exile.

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poor conditions under which the Jews of Fes were forced to live they preferred to return to their homelands and adhere to their new religion (Serero, 1989, vol. 1, 71).

28   For more about Serero's understanding of redemption, see Ohana (2014, 235-256).

The quality of the exile—namely the wide dispersion of the Jews—is also proof of Divine Providence: God found it necessary to disperse the Jews so that if non-Jews were to destroy a Jewish community in a certain place, there would still be another community elsewhere. Therefore, the sages explained the verse "righteous deeds towards the inhabitants of his villages in Israel" (Judges 5:11) as "God has done righteously with the People of Israel in His dispersion of them amongst the nations" (BT, *Pəsaḵim* 87b, Serero 1989, vol. 1, 123).

If so, Serero offered an alternative explanation to the historical reality, which is more suitable to Jewish belief, thus refuting the Christian's claim.

Historical arguments were often supported by references from the Scriptures,[29] and Serero continued in this line throughout his sermon. Serero states that both arguments presented by the apostate were mentioned in the book of Leviticus. Regarding the dispersion among the nations, it is written "I will scatter you amongst the nations" (Leviticus 26:33), while "you shall perish among the heathens" (38) points to the length of the exile. Yet immediately after mentioning the terrible fate to befall His people, God promised two kind of protection: "But despite all this, I will not utterly reject or despise them while they are in exile in the land of their enemies…" (44), thus ensuring the Jews' physical existence, and "I will not cancel my covenant with them by wiping them out, for I am the Lord their God" (ibid.), concerning their faith and belief.

Serero continued at length, adding verses from the Bible and sayings of Talmudic sages to support and explain his argument. However, as stated above this debate was with a Christian, and Serero felt it necessary to bring up the arguments posed by the contender and his own answers in a sermon

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29   In fact, exegetical arguments from the Hebrew Bible were the most prevalent in Jewish-Christian polemics (Lasker 1977, 3-7).

delivered shortly thereafter. Thus the above-mentioned documentation, the written sermon, is not a record of the original debate but of the oral sermon delivered thereafter. Moreover, it is likely that some changes were made when the sermon was later put in writing (Dan 1975, 35–36; Saperstein 1989, 7–9, 2–24). Therefore it is very possible that only some of the manifold sources mentioned in the written version were included in the oral sermon or in the original debate.

Nevertheless, the main points are valid, and an unofficial Jewish-Christian debate actually took place in Fes at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The debate centered on the issue of exile and redemption of Israel, one of the most common subjects of Christian-Jewish polemics. The argument that the long duration of the exile and the wide dispersion of the Jewish People were proof of God's providence was often used by medieval Jews to explain the exile to themselves. It seems that Serero developed this argument and used it further: he claimed that God's providence as perceived in the diaspora not only explains and offers comfort for the hardships of the Jewish exile but is also a guarantee of future redemption.

Episode II: *Šabat ha-Gadol* Sermon of 1607

Four years later, in his sermon on *Šabat ha-Gadol* of 1607, Serero argued that every Jew must believe in the future arrival of the Messiah. He added that although R. Joseph Albo (1380–1444) maintained that this belief is not one of the three main fundamentals of Jewish belief (God's existence; revelation; divine justice), and those contradicting the concept were

not considered heretics,[30] each and every Jew must believe it since it is "acknowledged by us, passed down to each generation, [originating] from the prophets who prophesized it" (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 182).

At this point Serero raised the question whether this tradition is reliable and trustworthy, since the Christian tradition claims that the Messiah has already arrived.

The Christian claim, opposing the Jewish belief that the Messiah has not yet arrived, was one of the fundamental arguments in medieval interfaith debates[31] and was even the subject of the polemical essay by Johan Harrison, an English diplomatic agent, written as a result of his stay in Morocco during the first third of the seventeenth century (Harrison 1612; Garcia-Arenal and Wiegers 2003, 75).

Serero refuted the Christian argument by questioning the entire Christian tradition: for if the Christian tradition is altogether faulty, he argued, then their tradition regarding the Messiah is also unreliable. Therefore, he had to determine whether the Christian or Jewish tradition was more credible, and whether a tradition is a reliable source at all: "Firstly we must clarify that tradition is most appropriate and most committed to the belief of each and every believing person" (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 183).

Serero's proof that a tradition which has been handed down throughout the generations is, in principle, a reliable source of information for the religious person consists of two arguments and was influenced by medieval

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30   In addition to the three fundamental principles of divine Law, Albo posits "root principles" (*šorašim*) that are derived from them. From the "root" principles, Albo proceeds to derive "branch principles" (*'anafim*). These are principles in which everyone adhering to Mosaic Law is obligated to believe, although one can practice Divine Law in general, and particularly Mosaic Law, without any of them (Kellner 1986, 140-151).

31   This, for example, was the first subject discussed in the Barcelona Disputation.

Jewish philosophical discourse on the subject, especially that of R. Joseph Albo (Albo 1946, 19; Lasker 1980):

a) This is similar to one who, based on his senses, recognizes the probable occurrence of a phenomenon even though such an occurrence seems theoretically impossible. This argument is based on the assumption that experience is prior to intellect, meaning that historical occurrences undermine doubt based on the theory of natural law—all the more so when many people were witness to the occurrence.[32]

b) When a certain generation witnesses a historical event, the members of that generation retell the story to their children and grandchildren who, in turn, continue to relate it to their offspring and so forth. The narration is reliable since fathers would not lie to their sons.

Therefore, the direct verification based on the first generation's senses (argument a) and the reliability of the testimony handed down from father to son (argument b) testify to the reliability of the tradition for the following generations, as though they were personally witness to the occurrence.[33]

Similarly, Serero believed that both the recipient (the son) and the bestower (the father) must verify the validity of the tradition. The recipient must ensure that he heard everything correctly, as is written "We have heard with our ears, Oh God" (Psalms 44:2), while the person passing on the tradition must fulfill two other conditions: a) he must ensure that he did

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32 R. Yehuda Halevi had already formulated this perception while confronting the philosophers' denial of the possibility of prophesy. He claimed that the actual occurrence of prophesy at Mt. Sinai refutes the philosophers' denial (Kreisel 2001, 100).

33 R. Saadia Gaon had already claimed that reliable tradition was parallel in its credibility to sensory perception, "authentic tradition is as trustworthy as things perceived with our own eyes" (Saadia Gaon 1948, 157). R. Yehuda Halevi stated, "I and the rest of the Jewish people are obliged to believe based on our first-hand encounter with God [at Mount Sinai]. We have passed down this account, without interruption, from generation to generation, and so even today it is as if we are eyewitnesses to the event" (Halevi 1998, 14-15).

not want to lie to the recipient—in this case, since the parents are passing on tradition to their own children, there should be no fear of this happening, "our ancestors tell us" (ibid.); b) he must ensure that the source of the tradition are those people who witnessed the occurrence themselves, as it is written "what work you did in their days" (ibid.).

If this were so, Serero had proven that a tradition is, in principle, a trusted source. At this point we can return to the matter at hand: Which is the reliable tradition concerning the arrival of the Messiah? The Jewish tradition that maintains that he has not yet arrived and is yet to come, or the Christian tradition that holds that he has already appeared? As I have already mentioned, Serero chose to discredit the entire Christian tradition and therefore its claim to the coming of the Messiah as well.[34]

He raised two arguments: the first, using a technique often utilized by medieval debaters, was based on a historical overview of the chain of events in Jesus' time.[35] Serero points out that Jesus was one single person who tended to disagree with the majority of his contemporaries, appointed

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34 As already stated, Serero was very much influenced by Albo's discussion of the issue of the credibility of a tradition but did not use his argument in the issue at hand, namely how one can know which tradition is the true one and which is not (although he did mention Albo's argument under different circumstances). Albo lays down two areas of investigation: a) an examination of the law itself, meaning that Divine Law must contain all the fundamental and root principles by virtue of which it exists; b) an examination of the messenger (prophet), either directly (essentially) or indirectly (Albo 1929, vol. I, chapter 18). Likewise, Serero did not use Albo's argument that Christianity should be rejected since it is based on impossible logic, while the Jewish faith is based on natural impossibility (vol. III, chapter 25; Lasker 1980).

35 From the early Middle Ages onwards, Jews who were interested had access to essays dealing with Jesus and the history of Christianity, such as *Sefer Toladot Yeshu (The Life of Jesus)*. In fact, historical essays describing Jewish history together with world history, such as R. Avraham Zechut's *Sefer Yuḥasin*, were written, inter alia, as a tool for use in inter-religious disputations against Christianity (Ben Shalom 1994). Furthermore, even Christian Historiography was available to the Jews of Spain and Provence in the Middle Ages (Ben Shalom 2006).

himself Messiah, and called himself the son of God. All rabbinic leaders of the time disagreed with Jesus' claim, and since he continued to hold by it he was sentenced to death. After his death, a few people in every generation continued to follow his teachings.

Similar to other Medieval Jewish debaters, Serero did not refute the details of the event but offered another meaning. Like others before him, he changed the Christological understanding of crucifixion, arguing that since Jesus rebelled he deserved the death penalty.[36]

Serero points out that Christian tradition is based on the evidence of a single person who deviated from the mainstream, while Jewish tradition is based on the evidence of many.[37] He added that Christians admit that their religion began with a small number of followers, and that this is even documented in the Christian Gospel. It should be noted that through this use of Christian literature, Serero takes advantage of his opponent's sources and explains them in a manner different to their original intent.[38] He added that in spite of the Christians being larger in number than Jews in his day, this was not any kind of proof but the earliest days of Christianity. In other words, according to Serero, since the Christian tradition is based on the testimony of a single man who deviated from the majority, it can be rejected.

Serero continued by stating that Jesus' disciples claimed that he also wrought miracles; however, he argues that those miracles do not obligate belief in him. In order to explain why, Serero used an exegetic argument:

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36 For example, "Every thing which the Jews did to him was good and just according to Your word, since they did His will" (Lasker and Stroumsa 1996, vol. I, 102).

37 This argument echoes Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, who discussed the 600,000 witnesses at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai (Yehuda Halevi 1988, 1, 88).

38 Amos Funkenstein defined this as "counter history" and pointed out its existence in polemic literature (Funkenstein 1992).

1) Jesus proclaimed himself God's son and even contradicted Jewish commandments, but according to Deuteronomy 13: 2–6, one should not listen to a prophet who wishes to sway the Jewish People from worshipping [the one] God to worshipping "other gods", even if he does perform miracles, since there is a possibility that the miracles were wrought through a spell or impure forces. Therefore miracles are not an indication that their performer is indeed a true prophet.

It must be pointed out that medieval Jewish theologists recognized the occurrence of miracles wrought by Christian holy men through impure powers and spirits (Galinsky 2011). Moreover, Kabbalists from the generation of the Spanish expulsion onwards had a demonological perception of Christianity, whereby Jesus himself was the incarnation of Samael (Gross 1993). Serero also held this position, and on *Šabat ha-Gadol* in 1612 he preached, "…and here all the paramount impure forces of impurity attached to Lilith and Samael materialized and became one, embodied as Jesus" (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 263).

2) Serero raised the possibility that there are those who may claim that the above-mentioned verse (Deuteronomy 13: 2–6) is applicable only against those who try to influence Jews to worship other gods, and therefore is not applicable to Jesus, who only claimed to be the Son of God. Serero replied that the concept that Jesus was the son of God transforms Jesus himself into a god (and not only a Messiah), since God is one; hence the Father and the Son are one and the same. Consequently, the Christian concept that Jesus is the Son of God classified Christianity as idolatry.

The debate over the Trinity was a central feature of almost every Jewish anti-Christian polemical work. According to Christian doctrine, there is one God with three personifications: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; each personification is God: still there is only one God.

By contrast, Jewish polemicists claimed that if the Father is God, and the Son is God as well, it would seem that the Father and the Son are one and the same, based on the logical ruling that two things that are identical with the third will also be identical to each other. Therefore the Christians' claim that it is possible to discern between the Father and the Son is incoherent. Therefore, a large number of Jewish polemicists rejected the Trinity doctrine since syllogistic logic refuted it (Lasker 1977, 90–93).

A careful reading of Serero's argument shows that he used this syllogism concerning the identity of the Father and the Son but did not refute the doctrine of the Trinity through logical argument, as did others. Serero pointed out that according to this view Jesus is God, and therefore Christianity must be defined as idolatry. Consequently, the miracles that Jesus wrought do not require one to believe in him since according to Deuteronomy (13: 2–6) one should not believe a prophet who tries to sway Jews to idolatry, even if he possesses the ability to perform wonders.

The second argument that Serero raised in undermining the credibility of Christian tradition deals with Christianity's annulment of divine commandments. The debate concerning the Christians' annulment of commandments was extremely stormy during the Middle Ages. Jewish polemicists raised the argument that the annulment of the commandments would have been foreign to Jesus himself,[39] thus emphasizing the changes initiated by Paul the Apostle. They tried to demonstrate that latter-day Christianity was unfaithful to its own sacred writings and hence had no validity even for the Christian, let alone the Jew (Schwartz 1994, 3).

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39   To that, R. Profiat Duran dedicated the fourth chapter of his book *The Reproach of the Gentiles.* As a result of this distinction between the original intention of Jesus and the subsequent church leaders, Duran and other Jewish thinkers argued that the history of early Christianity should be divided into two stages (Ben Shalom 2006, 154– 174).

Serero also mentions the gradual phasing out of commandments and notes that three hundred years after Jesus' death there were still Christians who observed the commandment of circumcision—until the pope ordered its annulment. Gradually, generation by generation, Christianity annulled commandments originating in the Pentateuch, until it eventually dismissed them all, claiming that the obligation to fulfill them was valid only until the time of Christ; from then onwards a new doctrine reigned.

However, it seems that for Serero the essence was not the radical departure from Jesus' intentions (hence the necessity for proof vis-à-vis the lack of the credibility of the Christian doctrine but the abolishment of the commandments themselves. The changes that the Christians wanted to make to the Divine Torah were proof of lack of credibility in Christian doctrine. Serero maintained that the Torah was divine and therefore perfect and eternal, and hence will never change. Moreover, if so many were present in the giving of the Torah, then how it can be argued that an event so public can be nullified in consequence of the testimony of one single person?

In other words, Serero claimed that the Christian tradition as a whole was not credible, hence the claim that the Messiah has already come must be repudiated as well. However, Jewish tradition has proven credible; hence its claim that the Messiah is still to appear remains firm and abiding.

If so, in one of his annual pre-Passover sermons, which were always devoted to the issue of salvation, Serero confronted Christian doctrine and rejected it. Since Serero did not specifically state that this was due to a debate that actually took place, as he did in the first case, it is quite possible that this was simply a theoretical reference to Christianity, but of this we can not be sure.

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Episode III: *Šabat ha-Gadol* Sermon of 1611

In his *Šabat ha-Gadol* sermon in 1611, Serero once again discussed the Christian belief that the Messiah had already come. Unlike the previous sermon, in which he sought to refute the Christian concept of redemption by undermining the credibility of the Christian tradition as a whole, Serero now found it necessary to refute the claim directly, "and according to the Christian argument that Messiah has already come and his promises have been fulfilled … we will clarify and show that the Messiah has not yet arrived" (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 253).

Serero found it necessary to begin by proving that the Torah hints about belief in the coming of the Messiah in Biləʿam's fourth prophesy (Numbers 24: 15–17).[40] "I see him but not now" (17), suggests the reign of King David; "I behold him, but not near" (ibid.), is a clue to the *Melex ha-Mašiaḥ*—the King Savior who will appear in the distant future of the end of days. "A star will come out of Jacob" is also a clue to King David's kingdom, while the continuation of the verse, "a scepter shall rise out of Israel", indicates the King Savior. Serero stated that Biləʿam's prophecies were mentioned in the Torah since they would be realized in the future; all came true except for the last. Therefore, one should believe that this last prophecy will still come true.

At the same time, Serero explained that this part of the Book of Numbers describes the exile of the First Temple and the subsequent redemption, while Deuteronomy (28:36; 28:68) deals with the present exile

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40   Earlier commentators had already interpreted Bilam's prophecy as dealing with the Messiah King. For example, Nahmanides (Numbers 24: 19), Abravanel (Numbers 24: 14-25), Rabbenu Bahye ben Asher (Numbers 24: 18), R. Avraham Saba (Numbers 24: 17), R. Moshe Alsheikh (Numbers 24: 15).

and redemption. Although the end of days is not explicitly mentioned in the admonitions cited in Deuteronomy,[41] there is a hint to it:

> "When all these things come upon you … and you return to the Lord your God and obey his voice … and God will restore you from captivity and have compassion for you, and will return and gather you from all the nations amongst whom the Lord your God has scattered you." (Deuteronomy, 30: 1–3).

The prophecy continues, "If your outcasts be at the ends of the earth, the Lord your God will take you from there". From here it can be deduced that this text did not allude to *Šivat Ṣiyon*—the Return to Zion after the destruction of the First Temple—because God did not gather all members of the Jewish nation from all over, but only from Babylon. Thus, the Torah's allusion is to a future redemption.

Serero then proved that contrary to Christian claims, the redeemer has not yet arrived, as the prophecies describing the era of the redemption did not occur during the time of the Second Temple: "Let us clarify that the redeemer has not yet come, since we have shown that the prophesies have not yet taken place" (Serero 1989, vol. 1, 256).

To mention just a few of Serero's examples: Isaiah's words pertaining to the redemption, "And the sons of strangers shall build your walls and their kings shall minister to you… the nation and the kingdom who shall not serve your will perish" (Isaiah, 60: 10–12), have not yet been realized. Nor have prophesies by Zechariah (14:8), Ezekiel (47:1) and Joel (4:18), pertaining to living water that leaves the holy Temple and Jerusalem. Zephaniah's prophecy about the days of redemption when all of the nations will believe

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41 Nahmanides already interpreted it thus in his explanation of Leviticus 26:16.

in God and "when I will purify the lips [languages] of the nations that they may all call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder [together]" (Zephaniah, 3:9) has not yet been realized either.

Consequently, rules Serero, the redemption and the redeemer have not yet arrived, and therefore these prophesies will be realized at the time of the future redemption. The unfulfilled state of these prophecies indicates that the redemption had not yet occurred; hence the Christian claim of the appearance of the Messiah is an explicit contradiction to scripture.

This kind of rejection of Christian dogma regarding the Messiah was common in Jewish anti-Christian writings. For example, R. Saʿadia Gaʾon's perception of redemption as apocalyptic refutes the Christian claim that the redemption occurred during Jesus' time and that Jesus was the Messiah, as all of the miracles that go together with the concept of the redemption as apocalyptic were not realized, and nature still stands as firmly as before (Saʿadia Gaʾon 1948, III, 7–8).[42] Years later, even those who held that the future redemption would be naturalistic adopted this argument, suiting it to their school of thought. Since no far-reaching social or political changes occurred with Jesus' appearance, they argued, he could not be classed as the Messiah (Schwartz 2005, 43–44).

If so, Serero utilized a set of arguments from his predecessors. However, he also added a new dimension, a new criterion stemming from the kabbalah. According to the kabbalah, Israel's exile manifests the exile of the *Šəxina* (the Divine Presence), meaning disconnection and separation of the spheres. However, at the time of the redemption the spheres will reunite (Sack 1980, 1995, 249–266). Accordingly, Serero maintained that

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42   R. Hasdai Crescas (1340-1410) also raised this argument claiming that since the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel, the Land of Israel had not been rebuilt, nor had world peace and abounding wisdom and prophecy been realized; it can therefore be deduced that the Messiah has not yet come (Crescas 1990, 77).

Ezekiel's prophecy—"Therefore saith the God the Lord" (Ezekiel, 39: 25), showing that at the time of redemption the unity of *tif'eret* and *malxut* (two of the ten attributes/emanations in the kabbalah) will be complete—did not happen in the Second Temple era.

Conclusion

Serero's annual sermons on the Sabbath preceding Passover were devoted to clarifying issues connected to the redemption in its various aspects. An overview of his sermons reveals that Serero was motivated not purely by interpretive motives, but that he also responded to religious and philosophical challenges on the subject. To a small extent this echoes the Jewish-Christian debate both in connection with an argument raised by a Christian undermining the Jewish' perception of redemption, and the Christian perception of salvation as a whole, particularly in relation to Jesus as the Messiah.

A review of Serero's sermons concerning Judeo-Christian polemics shows that he continued the Spanish tradition on the subject,[43] just as he had done in relation to other theological issues. It seems that Serero adopted and applied arguments from an existing, known corpus of polemics but shaped and edited them until he found an explanation that suited him.

It should be noted that his writings were not intended as polemical literature but rather as sermons delivered at regular times each year to uplift and encourage his congregation. The subject of redemption was a permanent one for the pre-Passover sermon, and therefore the rabbis'

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43   Lasker claims that very little changed in Jewish-Christian polemics with the transition from the Middle Ages (Lasker 2006).

intention was to reinforce belief in the future redemption. Apparently, Serero found it necessary to clarify this issue not only in its Jewish context, but with regard to Christian doctrine on the subject as well. If so, the question that may be raised is what historical reality does this sermonizing reflect?

Inasmuch as a work reflects its author's social and cultural context, it would seem that although missionary activity and religious debates were few in Jewish Fes, and Jews were not subject to measures against them after Morocco was liberated from Portugal, religious tension continued to exist. It would seem that when the public had become aware of the conflict between Christianity and Judaism, Serero found it necessary to debate Christian dogma in his public sermons.

Moreover, there were cases of conversion to Christianity among the community of Fez during Serero's lifetime. Such conversions took place due to the extreme distress to which the community was subjected to from time to time, while Christianity enjoyed prosperity and welfare. Both elements led some Jews to doubt the divine providence of God over the Jewish people and consequently led them to convert to Christianity, as Serero testified in a sermon from 1608:

> And all the success [of the gentiles] that Israel sees, is a reason [for Israel] to join in their religion [to Christianity] ... they [Israel] see Israel in its misery and therefore they deny the providence of god on Israel ... therefore the peacefulness and success of the gentiles was so astounding to them that it almost drew them away and they were weakened in their belief" (Serero 1989, vol.1, 215, my translation).

Acknowledgement

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Polemical Aspects in an Early Judeo-Persian Bible Exegesis

The Commentary on the Story of Ḥannah (RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4608)

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ABSTRACT   The article discusses the attitude towards Christians, Muslims, and the "foreign sciences" based on one of the only extant polemical texts written in Early Judeo-Persian—a passage from an unpublished commentary on story of Ḥannah preserved in the National Library of Russia (RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4608). In addition, the article attempts to define the relation of this commentary to the broader intellectual environment of the medieval Jewish world. A close examination of this passage reveals a possible connection to Karaite exegetical works written in Judeo-Arabic during the tenth century, particularly those of Yefet ben ʿEli. Therefore, the article may serve as a case study of intellectual contact and transmission of knowledge between different Jewish groups in the Islamicate world.

KEY WORDS   Polemics; Bible exegesis; Karaite; Yefet ben ʿEli; Early Judeo-Persian; Judeo-Arabic

The Jewish presence in the Iranian world in the first centuries of Islam (up to the Mongol invasion in the early thirteenth century) is well-attested. Various texts by Jews and Muslims alike point to the existence of Jewish communities from Khuzestan in the southwestern corner of present-day Iran to the city of Samarqand in present-day Uzbekistan (see, for example, Gil 2004, 520–532). Yet, most of the textual production of these Jewish communities did not survive. The extant non-documentary texts written in Early Judeo-Persian (henceforth EJP) amount to about a thousand pages of various genres, including liturgy, poetry, medicine, and, most extensively, Bible exegesis. The bulk of Judeo-Persian exegetical texts are preserved

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in the Russian National Library (henceforth RNL) and in the British Library (henceforth BL).

Among the manuscripts in the RNL collection, the commentary on Ezekiel (RNL Yevr.-Arab I 1682), the longest EJP text known to us, has been studied the most (Salemann 1900; Shaked 1986; MacKenzie 2003; Gindin 2003; Gindin 2004; Gindin 2008). It has also been recently edited and translated into English (Gindin 2007).[1] The linguistic features of two other manuscripts from the RNL—the commentary on the first weekly portion of the Book of Genesis (RNL Yevr.-Arab I 4605) and a fragment of a commentary on Jeremiah (RNL Yevr.-Arab I 4611)—have also been discussed (Shaked 2003; Shaked 2009). The abovementioned studies have clarified the unique linguistic features of EJP and facilitated a further investigation into various aspects of EJP Bible exegesis.

In this paper, I discuss one aspect of EJP Biblical exegesis, namely the attitude towards Christians, Muslims, and the "foreign sciences" as reflected in a polemical passage from a commentary on the prayer of Ḥannah (RNL Yevr.-Arab I 4608). To the best of my knowledge, this is the only source in the EJP exegetical corpus from both libraries where a direct polemic against these groups is found. By discussing this passage, I will also attempt to situate it in the broader intellectual environment of the medieval Jewish world and to define its connection with the medieval exegetical literature written in Hebrew and in Judeo-Arabic.

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1   In this context, see also Paul (2013), a comprehensive study of the grammar of Early Judeo-Persian.

The Early Judeo-Persian Bible Exegesis: Dating and Provenance[2]

The exegetical corpus from both libraries consists of nine manuscripts (RNL Yevr-Arab. I 1682, 4605–4611, BL Or. 2549–2460) containing commentaries on selected portions of the Pentateuch and of the Prophets. The dating of these manuscripts relies heavily on paleography.[3] According to George Margoliouth, the two manuscripts from the BL (Or. 2549–2460) were copied by Rabbanites during the sixteenth century or even later (Margoliouth 1899, 184–185). However, my research into the manuscripts in both libraries, as well as their paleographical examination (Edna Engel, pers. comm.), suggests that they were copied during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with the exception of RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4606, which was authored/copied during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The orthographical, morphological, and syntactical features of the BL manuscripts are shared by other pre-Mongol Judeo-Persian texts, as identified by a number of scholars (Gindin 2004; Shaked 2009; Paul 2013). Moreover, my research shows that the linguistic features and the handwritings of the BL manuscripts are similar, if not identical, to those of manuscripts in the RNL. Based on their content, it is evident that some of the manuscripts in both libraries belong to the same codex. For example, RNL Yevr.-Arab I 4609, which contains a commentary on 2 Sam. 6, is the direct continuation of BL Or. 2460. In addition, the missing text in the

2   This section is a general survey of my initial findings regarding the EJP manuscripts from the BL and the RNL. I am currently studying these manuscripts as part of my Ph.D. dissertation on Early Judeo-Persian Bible exegesis and its connections with Karaite and Rabbanite exegetical literature in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic from the ninth to eleventh centuries.

3   A thorough paleographical study of the manuscripts written in Early Judeo-Persian is currently being conducted by Dr. Edna Engel (The National Library of Israel).

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middle of BL Or. 2460 (between folios 18 and 19) can be found within the commentary on the first weekly portion of Genesis in RNL (RNL Yevr.-Arab. 4605, fol. 4). Other manuscripts, however, were apparently grouped together at a certain point in time due to similar physical features and should be treated separately (e.g., the various quires of BL Or. 2459).

The manuscripts must have been copied by the same group of scribes, as the same handwritings reappear in different parts of the corpus. While it is possible that this group of scribes copied works from various sources of no common origin, there is a strong possibility that most of these manuscripts originate from a certain exegetical school that existed among Persian-speaking Jews during the eleventh century.

At this point, we have yet to identify the place of composition or copying of these manuscripts. Although the commentary on 1 Sam. 1:11–2:10 (RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4608, 1r–6r) contains a colophon, the place of composition or copying mentioned in the colophon is illegible. We do, however, learn that the work is titled *Oṣar neḥmad* and that the name of the scribe (who may also be the author) is Geršon ben Yefet the teacher (*melammed*). To the best of my knowledge, the name Geršon ben Yefet is not attested in other sources. The colophon also mentions the name of Geršon's teacher, Yaʿaqov ben ʿEli. A certain Yaʿaqov ben ʿEli (died before 1211) is mentioned in texts from the Cairo Genizah from the second half of the twelfth century. This Yaʿaqov, who is also called *reš be rabanan*, was the pupil of Šəmuʾel ben ʿEli, the head of the Jewish academy in Baghdad. He was sent by Šəmuʾel to various Jewish communities to take care of material as well as spiritual matters. At a certain point, Yaʿaqov may have emigrated from Baghdad to Fustat (Gil 2004, 480). Whether Geršon's teacher is the same Yaʿaqov ben

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'Eli is difficult to ascertain. If the commentary is Karaite, this suggestion appears to be even less likely.[4]

As stated above, a number of EJP manuscripts in the RNL is directly connected to one of the manuscripts found in the BL, namely BL Or. 2460. Therefore, the EJP manuscripts from both libraries were apparently in the same location before they were purchased in the nineteenth century. The most likely source of these manuscripts is the Karaite synagogue Dar Simha in Cairo. The EJP manuscripts in the RNL belong to the first Judeo-Arabic series (RNL Yevr.-Arab I). This series was formerly part of the second Firkovich collection, named after Avraham Firkovich, a Karaite communal leader and scholar who collected an impressive array of manuscripts from different locations during his lifetime. After Firkovich's death, the second collection was sold to the Public Imperial Library (now the RNL) in 1876 (Sklare 2003, 895). A significant portion of the manuscripts in the second Firkovich collection originate from the Dar Simha synagogue (Elkin and Ben-Sasson 2002, 65–71; Sklare 2003, 895). It seems possible that the EJP manuscripts in this collection were also found there. As for the EJP manuscripts in the BL, they were purchased in 1882 from Wilhelm Moses Shapira together with a large group of manuscripts, most of which are Karaite (Hoerning 1889, v; Sklare 2003, 896, 899–900). It seems that

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4   Karaism is a religious movement whose proponents reject the authority of Jewish oral law, which was accepted by the Rabbanites, and claim to adhere to a more scripture-based Judaism. Karaism (or proto-Karaism) emerged during the eighth century in present-day Iran and Iraq. The movement flourished between the late ninth and the eleventh centuries, especially in Jerusalem, where the Karaite community known as 'the Mourners of Zion' produced an impressive amount of compositions in an array of subjects, such as Bible exegesis, theology, and Hebrew grammar. For an overview of the history of the Karaite movement in the medieval Islamic world, particularly of the Karaite community of Jerusalem, see Polliack (2003a, 73–252); for a survey of Karaite scholarship and literature, see Polliack (2003a, 255–413).

Shapira also acquired manuscripts from the Dar Simha synagogue (Elkin and Ben-Sasson 2002, 77; Sklare 2003, 896).[5]

The possible origin of these EJP manuscripts in Cairo does not necessarily suggest that they were composed or copied there. These manuscripts may have been brought to Cairo by Jewish immigrants of Persian origin, whose presence in the city is well-attested from the tenth century onwards. Several dozen EJP texts discovered in the Genizah of the Ibn Ezra synagogue indicate this (Shaked 1985, 25–27). Evidence for the activity of (Karaite) Jews of Persian descent in the area between Cairo and Damascus also exists in the manuscripts from the Dar Simha synagogue, since many of them contain family names denoting a Persian origin (Ben-Shammai 2006, 99–101). Furthermore, their possible origin in a Karaite synagogue does not necessarily support the conjecture that the EJP manuscripts are Karaite, as many Rabbanite works or fragments thereof have been found in the Dar Simha synagogue (Ben-Shammai 2010, 46–47).

Several commentaries on selected portions of the Pentateuch are clearly Karaite, as becomes apparent in the commentary on the first weekly portion of the Book of Genesis (Shaked 2003, 202–204) and the commentary on the third weekly portion of the Book of Numbers (BL Or. 2459, 1r–32v). However, the religious affiliation of the commentaries on the sections from the Prophets remains unclear. There are several passages in the texts that may suggest that they are Karaite. For example, both the commentary on Ezekiel (Gindin 2007, vol. 1, 227; trans. vol. 2, 385) and BL Or. 2460 (13r:16)

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5   Another possible source of the EJP manuscripts is the Karaite community of the town of Hit in Iraq. Some of Shapira's manuscripts may have come from there (Hoerning 1889, v; Sklare 2003, 896). It is also possible that the Karaite community of Hit sent manuscripts to Firkovich (Elkin and Ben-Sasson 2002, 62–63).

contain the phrase *the shepherds of the Exile* (רועי גלות, *roʿe galut*),[6] a term which was used by the Karaites when referring to the Rabbanite leadership of the Jewish diaspora (Erder 1998, 65).

Another issue related to the question of the religious affiliation of this exegetical corpus is its polemics against the views of Jewish and non-Jewish groups. As far as I have been able to discern, most of the commentaries contain almost no direct polemical discussions.[7] Although the author of the commentary on Ezekiel occasionally rejects exegetical explanations concerning a certain word or phrase (Gindin 2000, 43), he rarely refers to matters pertaining to religious thought, such as arguing against the doctrine of prophetic immunity from sin (Gindin 2007, vol. 1, 35; trans. vol. 2, 15–16). In addition, the explanations and views rejected by the author are anonymous (Gindin 2000, 43), making it difficult to trace their sources. One exception is the commentary on the first weekly portion of the Book of Genesis. This commentary includes attacks against the Rabbanites, especially against R. Saʿadya Gaʾon (d. 942) and his views on the Jewish calendar (Shaked 2003, 202–204). Except for the Rabbanites, almost no other group is criticized for its doctrines and beliefs. As for

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6   In view of the fact that this study is based on texts written in different languages and scripts, I employ different systems of transliteration. The transliteration of Arabic words follows the system of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES). Transliteration of biblical Hebrew is according to the system of Brill's *Handbook of Jewish Languages*, except that *seghol* and *ḥaṭeph seghol* are transliterated as -*e*- and -*ĕ*-, respectively. Non-biblical Hebrew is transliterated according to the system of Brill's *Handbook of Jewish Languages* for post-biblical Hebrew. See Kahn and Rubin (2016, XVII–XVIII). EJP texts are accompanied by a letter-for-letter transliteration.

7   In general, the amount of extant polemical texts written in EJP is very small. One of the few texts that may be regarded as apologetic is a fragmentary manuscript (BL Or. 8659) discussing the prophethood of Moses and the precepts of the Torah. It was identified as an introduction to a Karaite *sefer miṣvot (*see Rosenvasser 1968, 41). For an edition of the text entitled "Early Jewish-Persian Argument", see MacKenzie (1968, 249–269). See also Shaked (1971, 178–180).

Christians and Muslims (commonly referred to as ''Edom and Ishmaʿel, respectively), they are mentioned throughout the corpus with reference to their fate in the time of salvation. References to their doctrines, beliefs, and attitude towards the Jews in exile are virtually non-existent. It seems that the commentary on the story of Ḥannah is the only text in the corpus openly criticizing the views of Christians and Muslims, as well as those of philosophers and astrologers.

The Commentary on the Story of Ḥannah (RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4608, 1r–6r)

The manuscript of the commentary, dated to the second half of the eleventh or the beginning of the twelfth century and authored or copied by Geršon ben Yefet, is not complete and starts in the middle of the discussion of 1 Sam. 1:11. In addition, the first few pages have been badly preserved, making them only partly legible.

Like other EJP commentaries on portions from the Prophets, it is difficult to determine whether this text is Karaite or Rabbanite. There are almost no terms or discussions that might lead to a definitive conclusion. However, the term *maskilim*, which was used extensively in Karaite literature (Wieder 2005, 104–110), does make one appearance. According to the commentator, the phrase *He raises up the poor from the dust*[8] refers to the Remnant of Israel and to the *maskilim*.[9] The fact that the term is integrated

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8   1 Sam. 2:8: מֵקִים מֵעָפָר דָּל (*mēqīm mē-ʿāp̄ār dāl*). English translations of the biblical text are according to the New Revised Standard Version (henceforth NRSV), if not noted otherwise.

9   RNL Yevr.-Arab I 4608, 5r:9–10: מקים מעפר דל שארית ומשכילים הנד (*mqym mʿpr dl šʾryt wmškylym hnd*, 'He raises up the poor from the dust', are the *Remnant of Israel* and the

into a non-Hebrew text and not as part of a biblical quote may suggest that the text is Karaite. Furthermore, as will be shown below, the commentator may have known and relied partially on the writings of authors from the tenth century, mainly the Karaite exegete Yefet ben ʿEli, who was a member of the Karaite community of Jerusalem known as the "Mourners of Zion." Yet this does not necessarily mean that the commentator of the discussed treatise was Karaite, as later Rabbanite scholars directly or indirectly also relied on the works of Yefet (see, for example, Polliack and Schlossberg 2009, 97–100).

The extant commentary is divided into twenty-eight units (as the number of the extant verses), each of which consists of several elements. Each unit begins with the first few words of the Hebrew verse, followed by the (partial or full) word-for-word translation of the verse into EJP. This is followed by a separate treatment of each portion of the verse. The commentator first gives the literal-contextual interpretation of the text, followed by an actualizing reading of it, referring to the hardships of the people of the exile (גלותיאן, *glwty'n*) or to the welfare of the kingdoms of ʾEdom and Ishmaʿel.[10] Some units end with a promise of the salvation of Israel or the punishment of the gentiles, or both, supported by various biblical verses.

Not every unit includes all the elements specified above. Some lack, for example, a complete word-for-word translation or a prognostic exegetical explanation referring to the people of the exile or to ʾEdom and Ishmaʿel. However, this structure may be demonstrated in several units, such as that discussing 1 Sam. 1:15 (*But Ḥannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman*

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maśkilim).

10   By "actualization", I refer to the tendency to interpret scripture according to contemporary events. For a discussion of the literal-contextual and actualizing approaches in Karaite exegesis, see Polliack (2003b, 372–396).

deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord").[11] In this verse, Ḥannah answers the high priest ʿEli, who rebuked her for being drunk after seeing her praying silently by moving her lips:

> *But Ḥannah answered.* And Ḥannah answered and said: "No, (my) lord, I am a hard-souled woman and I did not drink wine and an intoxicating (drink), and I am pouring out the bitterness of my soul before the Lord."

> Ḥannah answered him when she heard this (ʿEli's rebuke) and said to him: "No, (my) lord." She said two things to him: The first—she said: "No, no, O lord, no, I am not drunk." The second—"I want the happiness that the Israelites [have?], but *I am a hard-souled woman.* [There is] much bitterness and sorrow in my heart, and (as for) myself, *I did not drink wine* ^{read: *and an intoxicating (drink)*}."[12]

> And just as Ḥannah said about herself: "*I am a hard-souled (woman),*" likewise he said about the people of the exile: *For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God* (Is. 54:6). And just as the Lord made Ḥannah happy, likewise the Lord will make the people of the exile happy, as he said: *O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice* etc. (Joel 2:23).

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11 *wat-taʿan* (וַתַּעַן חַנָּה וַתֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲדֹנִי אִשָּׁה קְשַׁת רוּחַ אָנֹכִי וְיַיִן וְשֵׁכָר לֹא שָׁתִיתִי וָאֶשְׁפֹּךְ אֶת נַפְשִׁי לִפְנֵי יְהוָה) *Ḥannā wa-tōmer lō ʾăḏōnī ʾiššā qəšaṯ rūaḥ ʾānōḵī wə-yayin wə-šēḵār lō šāṯīṯī wā-ʾešpōḵ ʾeṯ nap̄šī lip̄nē YHWH*).

12 Graphic signs used in this article: 1) Square brackets indicate lacunas in the manuscript, in which partly legible letters, words, or phrases are suggested. 2) Round brackets indicate complementary suggestions for translation of letters, words, or phrases not written in the original text. 3) Passages written above the line or glosses in the margins of the original manuscript are given in superscript.

And I am pouring out my soul before the Lord. She said: "I am pouring out the bitterness of my soul before the Lord, so he will grant me my will." Likewise, these people of the exile say: *I pour out my complaint before him* etc. (Ps. 142:3, NRSV 142:2); *These things I remember as I pour out my soul* etc. (Ps. 42:5, NRSV 42:4).[13]

The discussion of this verse closely follows the structure outlined above. It begins with a short quote from the Hebrew verse and its almost word-for-word translation ('the bitterness of,' תהלי, *thly*, is an addition by the commentator). The commentator then explains the meaning of Ḥannah's words: "I am a hard-souled woman and I did not drink wine and an intoxicating (drink)." The next element is the actualization of the biblical text by comparing the people of the exile to Ḥannah. The treatment of the first portion of the verse ends with a statement that God will make the people of the exile rejoice, just as he made Ḥannah. The commentator similarly deals with the second part of the verse: *and I am pouring out my soul before the Lord*. He first paraphrases Ḥannah's words and then compares the people of the exile to Ḥannah. The two verses quoted here describe the people of the exile's plea to God. As with the verse said by Ḥannah, they contain verbs from the Semitic root שפך ('to pour'). However, unlike the discussion of the first portion of the verse, there is no reference here to the time of salvation.

The tendency to actualize the biblical text with or without a reference to time of salvation is quite apparent in this commentary. This could be explained by the fact that the commentator considered Ḥannah's prayer a prophetic text. That Ḥannah was considered a prophetess is already attested in early Rabbinical works. Ḥannah is one of the seven prophetesses

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13   For the EJP text, see Appendix, I.

enumerated in the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli, Megilla, 14a). According to the Aramaic translation of the prophets (Targum Yonatan), Ḥannah prayed in the spirit of prophecy.[14] Jewish medieval commentators also adopted the view of Ḥannah's prayer being prophecy. For example, Yefet ben ʿEli writes that Ḥannah said that her prayer was by the Holy Spirit, and that it was divided into two parts: the first part described the deeds constantly done by God and the second part described God's deeds that he would do for Israel at the time of salvation (Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 271).[15] Similarly, R. David Qimḥi (d. 1235) states that most of Ḥannah's prayer is a prophecy concerning the hardships of Israel and their subsequent salvation (Cohen 1993, 11).

The fact that Ḥannah prophesied is clearly stated in a few places in the EJP text. After raising the possibility that ʿEli was still convinced that Ḥannah was intoxicated and that she had denied this only out of fear of him, the commentator explains: "Know that Ḥannah's heart was just and [because of] this He gave her two things: the first—a son; the second—the prophecy of the future."[16] Furthermore, in a partially legible passage discussing 1 Sam. 1:28–2:1, it is written that "The Lord endowed her (i.e., Ḥannah) with the Holy Spirit" (רוח הקודש, *ruaḥ ha-qodeš*).[17] Further on, following the literal translation of 1 Sam. 2:1, the commentator states: "[…] this, from the beginning to the end, all (of it) is future events" (אין סר תא בון המא עתידות היסת, *ʾyn sr tʾ bwn hmʾ ʿtydwt hyst*; Appendix, II).

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14   1 Sam. 2:1: וצליאת חנה ברוח נבואה (*wə-ṣaliʾaṯ ḥanā bə-rūaḥ nəḇūʾe*).

15   In general, the Holy Spirit, which originates in inspiration (*ilhām*), was considered a form of prophecy by Yefet ben ʿEli. See Ben-Shammai (1977, 269–273; 2015a, 130–135, specifically p. 133, where Ḥannah is mentioned).

16   For the EJP text, see Appendix, III.

17   For the EJP text, see Appendix, II.

Polemics in the EJP Commentary on the Story of Ḥannah

In the commentary on the story of Ḥannah, we find quite a few discussions that are detached from the immediate context of the biblical text and concern the difficult present conditions of Israel in exile or the time of salvation. However, the discussion of the first part of 1 Sam. 2:3 (*Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth*) is unusual.[18] It is aimed against several groups whose arrogance and pride are manifested in their practices, sayings, or beliefs. The commentator starts by giving a literal translation of the first part of the verse mentioned above and then turns to describe these groups in the following manner:

> *Talk no more*. Do not talk anymore so very proudly, so very highly (lit. ‘proud, proud, high, high’), and may abomination not come out of your mouth.
>
> Know that Ḥannah said these things concerning two matters. The first—concerning the astronomers and the philosophers of the world who do not believe in the prophets. And they say: “The creation of the world was thus,” which should be said or written, all of which David abhorred and said: *O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me* (Ps. 131:1). For they say about the sun: “Its size (lit. ‘length’) is this much,” and they say about the moon: “It is larger (lit. ‘longer’) than the earth.” They say about the stars this much and such. And they say many things about

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[18] אַל תַּרְבּוּ תְדַבְּרוּ גְּבֹהָה גְבֹהָה יֵצֵא עָתָק מִפִּיכֶם (*ʾal tarbū ṯədabbərū gəḇōhā ḡəḇōhā yēṣē ʿāṯāq mip-pīḵem*).

the Lord, who is God, and do not believe in the prophets. And they say other (things) about God that should not be said.

The second matter—she said (it) about the kingdom of ʾEdom and Ishmaʿel. For ʾEdom says that Jesus is in heaven, and he says: "As long as the world exists, my kingdom shall exist." As he said: "*Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, (whose dwelling is in the heights.) You say*" etc. (Obad. 1:3). Ishmaʿel says worse than this, as he said: "In the prophecy of Isaiah (it is written that) the *pasul* will appear." And he (i.e., Isaiah) says this: "*You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High*" (Is. 14:13–14). And he (i.e., Ishmaʿel) said many things (of) heresy.

And Asaph said about this: "*They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression*" (Ps. 73:8). And Moses said about them: "*They pour out their arrogant words; all the evildoers boast*" (Ps. 94:4).

Let not arrogance come from [your mouth]. Its interpretation (is) *may arrogance not come from your mouth*.[19]

The passage above describes three different groups: "the astronomers and philosophers of the world," ʾEdom, and Ishmaʿel. These groups are divided into two sections: those who believe in prophecy and those who deny it. The deniers of prophecy are the astronomers and philosophers of

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19   For the EJP text, see Appendix, IV.

the world, whereas those who believe in it are ʾEdom and Ishmaʿel, namely the Christians and the Muslims, respectively.

A similar division in accordance with the belief in prophecy is attested in earlier Jewish texts which were possibly known to our commentator and served as background for his own division. For example, in the thirteenth chapter of his work *ʿIshrūn maqāla*, the ninth-century Jewish theologian Dawud b. Marwan al-Muqammas writes that there are two groups of monotheists (*man aqarra bi-l-tawḥīd*)—those who deem prophecy necessary and those who deny it. The latter are the *barāhima* (Stroumsa 1989, 254–255).[20] Another example is Yefet ben ʿEli's commentary on Psalms, where he distinguishes between Christians and Muslims, on the one hand, and various sects and religions, on the other. In his discussion of Psalms 139:19–22, Yefet writes that verses 19–20 refer to Christians and Muslims, whereas verses 21–22 are directed against those who believe in the eternity of the world (*dahriyya*), pagans, and the *barāhima* who deny (God's) law (*al-sharʿ*; Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 320–321).

On Astronomers and Philosophers

According to passage IV, "the astronomers and the philosophers of the world" deny the concept of prophecy. The commentator does not state that they deny the existence of God. It is more likely, therefore, that he considers them monotheists. The denial of prophecy is not the sole reason for his criticism of the astronomers and the philosophers. The commentator adds to this a number of forbidden practices, namely saying unworthy

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20   For further discussion of the identity of the *barāhima* in Islamic and Jewish traditions, see Stroumsa (1999, 145–162); Crone (2009).

things about the creation of the world and about God, as well as discussing the properties of the celestial bodies. It is possible, therefore, that he refers to scholars who adhere to the writings of the Greek philosophers and deal with the natural sciences.

The commentator does not specify the views of the astronomers and philosophers concerning God and the creation of the world. It is possible that the "unworthy things said of God" are anthropomorphic descriptions. The EJP Bible exegesis seems to reject such descriptions. Thus, for example, in the commentary on Jer. 1:9, the word יָד (*yāḏ*, 'hand') in the phrase *Then the Lord put out his hand* is rendered by the word 'prophecy' (נבואה, *nbwʾh*; BL Or. 2460, 1v:17).[21] A verse from Ezekiel (Ezek. 37:1) is given in the same context: *The hand of the Lord came upon me* (BL Or. 2460, 1v:17–18).[22] Interestingly, the translation of this verse in the commentary on Ezekiel is *the prophecy of the Lord was upon me* (Gindin 2007, vol. 2, 418).[23]

As for the creation of the world, the commentator may be disputing various views here, such as the belief in the eternity (*dahr*) of the world in contrast to the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. The rejection of the belief in the eternity of the world is attested in the writing of several Rabbanite and Karaite scholars who lived during the tenth century, such as R. Saʿadia Gaʾon (Davidson 1987, 95–106), and the Karaites Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī and Yefet ben ʿEli (Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 174–190). It is plausible to assume that, like these scholars and the author of the commentary on the first weekly portion of Genesis (see, for example, RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4605, 16v:15–17r:3), our author was a supporter of the view of the creation of the world *ex nihilo*.

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21   Jer. 1:9: וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת יָדוֹ (*way-yišlaḥ YHWH ʾeṯ yāḏō*).

22   Ezek. 37:1: הָיְתָה עָלַי יַד יְהוָה (*hāyəṯā ʿālay yaḏ YHWH*).

23   Gindin (2007, vol. 1, 242): בי בוד אבר מן נבואת י׳י (*by bwd ʾbr mn nbwʾt yʾy*).

At the same time, it is possible that the commentator did not intend to debate with the astronomers and philosophers directly about specific issues, but rather to highlight that it is forbidden to deal with what is beyond the limits of human knowledge. This can be deduced from the fact that in the middle of the discussion, the commentator quotes Ps. 131:1, which conveys the same idea, "*O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me*".[24] It is worth noting that the same verse is also quoted by Yefet ben 'Eli while discussing the phrase *for the Lord is a God of knowledge*.[25] Yefet cites it to clarify that God disapproves of the discussion of hidden things (*khafiyyāt*) known to Him (but not to human beings).[26] As for the interpretation of Ps. 131:1 itself, Yefet identifies the subjects that are beyond human knowledge, the first of which are the wonders of creation. He stresses that this subject has preoccupied the sages of the gentiles (חכמי הגוים, *ḥaḵme ha-goyim*), who speak of the dimensions of the

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24 Ps. 131:1: יְהוָה לֹא גָבַהּ לִבִּי וְלֹא רָמוּ עֵינַי וְלֹא הִלַּכְתִּי בִּגְדֹלוֹת וּבְנִפְלָאוֹת מִמֶּנִּי (*YHWH lō ḡāḇah libbī wə-lō rāmū 'ēnay wə-lō hillaḵtī bi-ḡḏōlōṯ u-ḇ-niṗlā'ōṯ mimmennī*).

25 1 Sam. 2:3: כִּי אֵל דֵּעוֹת יְהוָה (*kī 'ēl dē'ōṯ YHWH*).

26 BL Or. 2547, 47v:3–7:

ثم قالوا **كي ايل ديعو[ث]** (4) **''' (1 Sam. 2:3)** وفيه قولان الواحد ... والاخر ان الله عارف الخفيات عن الناس فمن تعاطا الكلام (6) عليها فقد تكلم بما ينكره الله عليه وفي مثل ذلك قال داود عليه السلم (7) **ولوا هلاختي بغذولوث وبنيﻐﻼوث ممانﻰ** (Ps. 131:1).

(3) ... *thumma qālū kī 'ēl dē'ō[ṯ]* (4) **YY'** (1 Sam. 2:3) *wa-fīhi qawlān al-wāḥid ... wa-l-āḵhar anna allāh 'ārif al-khafiyyāt 'an al-nās fa-man ta'āṭā l-kalām* (6) *'alayhā fa-qad takallama bi-mā yunkiruhu allāh 'alayhi wa-fī mithl dhālika qāla dāwūd 'alayhi al-silm* (7) **wə-lō hillaḵtī bi-ḡḏōlōṯ u-ḇ-niṗlā'ōṯ mimmennī** (Ps. 131:1)

This manuscript is most likely one of the oldest Karaite manuscripts written in Arabic characters. For its description, see Margoliouth (1899, 207–208); Hoerning (1889, 45–60). For studies concerning Karaite manuscripts of the Bible in Arabic characters, see Hoerning (1889); Khan (1990). For the importance of the manuscripts of Yefet ben 'Eli's commentaries written in Arabic characters, see Ben-Shammai (1976).

celestial spheres (*aflāk*), the stars, and the (ends of) the seas and the earth (Vajda 1971, 129, 230; Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 101).

The rejection of the sciences appears to be typical of some Jewish groups in the Iranian world. The tenth-century Karaite scholar Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī attacks "those who are said to be Karaites"—some of whom are Persians, such as a group among the Tustarīs—who "find fault with those who engage in intellectual speculation (*naẓar*), i.e. by means of secular (*barrānī*; lit. 'external, foreign') sciences, either dialectics or philosophy" (Nemoy 1939, vol. 1, 3–4; transl. Chiesa and Lockwood 1984, 93–94; see also Gil 1981, 61–62; Rustow 2008, 141–142). The rejection of the foreign sciences is also apparent in the writings of the Karaite scholar Daniel al-Qūmiṣī, one of the founders of the Karaite community in Jerusalem, whose name indicates his Iranian origin (Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 105 with relevant references).

The condemnation of "foreign sciences" was not exclusive to certain Persian-speaking Jewish circles, whose affiliation with the Karaite movement is questioned by al-Qirqisānī, or to early Karaites who originated in Iran. It also occurs in the works of several tenth-century Jewish scholars—Karaite and Rabbanite alike, such as the Karaite commentators Salmon ben Yeruḥim (Robinson 2012, 127–135) and Yefet ben ʿEli (Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 101–108; Sasson 2016, 108–120), as well as R. Saʿadia Gaʾon (Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 104). The commentator of the EJP text might have drawn on the views reflected in the writings of these scholars for his argument.

Another aspect of our discussion is the association of the denial of prophecy with the advocating of "foreign sciences". Islamic sources quite often describe the deniers of prophecy as followers of a rationalistic approach who argue for the supremacy and sufficiency of the human intellect. Arguments concerning the human intellect are connected, for

example, to figures such as Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. 860 or 912; Stroumsa 1999, 79–81) or Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925 or 935; Stroumsa 1999, 111–112). They are attested in Jewish sources as well. For example, in his commentary on the Book of Proverbs, Yefet ben ʿEli attributes the title *leṣim* (לצים, 'scoffers') to those who follow the "foreign sciences", on the one hand (Prov. 9:13), and to those who reject prophecy, on the other (Prov. 1:22; Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 105–106; Sasson 2016, 110–112).

On ʾEdom

The commentator presents two arguments regarding ʾEdom in order to demonstrate the latter's pride and arrogance. The first argument, namely that Jesus is in heaven, is theological, and possibly alludes to the belief in the resurrection of Jesus[27] or to his divine nature as the Son. The second argument is the perpetual existence of the kingdom of ʾEdom, expressing ʾEdom's confidence in its political and military superiority. As evidence, the commentator quotes a verse from the prophecy of Obadiah: *Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?"*[28]

It is no surprise that the commentator chooses to quote Obadiah's prophecy on ʾEdom, particularly the third verse, in which the latter talks proudly and doubts his future demise. The answer to ʾEdom's question does not appear in the EJP text. However, the commentator might have trusted the reader to know it and understand the final fate of ʾEdom, as

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27   I thank Dennis Halft for drawing my attention to this matter.

28   Obad. 1:3: זְדוֹן לִבְּךָ הִשִּׁיאֶךָ שֹׁכְנִי בְחַגְוֵי סֶלַע מְרוֹם שִׁבְתּוֹ אֹמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ מִי יוֹרִדֵנִי אָרֶץ (*zəḏōn libbəḵā hiśśīʾeḵā šōḵənī ḇə-ḥaḡwē selaʿ mərōm šiḇtō ʾōmēr bə-libbō mī yōriḏēnī ʾāreṣ*).

it is prophesied by Obadiah: *Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.*[29]

The commentator applies the prophecy of Obadiah to both Jesus and ʾEdom, assuring the falseness of Christian beliefs and the demise of Christendom. As for Yefet ben ʿEli's commentary on Obadiah, in the discussion of Obad. 1:3, Yefet suggests that the phrase *Your proud heart has deceived you* (זְדוֹן לִבְּךָ הִשִּׁיאֶךָ; *zəḏōn libbəḵā hiśśīʾeḵā*) refers to the insolence of ʾEdom, who invented the Trinity, attributed a son to God, anthropomorphized God, and claimed that the Torah was abrogated. In addition, ʾEdom accused Israel of killing the son of God, and subsequently thought that all of Israel should suffer annihilation (Polliack and Schlossberg 2001, 73–74; Zuran 2012, 145–147). Another reason for ʾEdom's arrogance is the fortifications of his land, manifested in the phrase *you that live in the clefts of the rock* (שֹׁכְנִי בְחַגְוֵי סֶלַע; *šōḵənī ḇə-ḥaḡwē selaʿ*). According to Yefet, the phrase *the clefts of the rock* (חַגְוֵי סֶלַע; *ḥaḡwē selaʿ*) refers to the land of Byzantium, which is like an inaccessibly high mountain (Polliack and Schlossberg 2001, 74; Zuran 2012, 147–148).

Though not as elaborate as Yefet, the commentator of the EJP text adopts a similar approach. ʾEdom's sense of pride is manifest in two different ways: his (false) theological doctrines and his sense of confidence due to his geographical location. Unlike Yefet, the commentator does not attack ʾEdom for his harsh treatment of Israel based on the accusation that Israel was responsible for the death of Jesus.[30]

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29 Obad. 1:4: אִם תַּגְבִּיהַּ כַּנֶּשֶׁר וְאִם בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים שִׂים קִנֶּךָ מִשָּׁם אוֹרִידְךָ נְאֻם-יְהוָה ('*im taḡbīah kan-nešer wə-ʾim bēn kōḵāḇīm śīm qinneḵā miš-šām ʾōrīḏəḵā nə'um YHWH*).

30 See also the discussion of Yefet ben ʿEli's commentary on Ps. 53 (Erder 1997, 43–44).

Ofir Haim

On Ishmaʿel

The last group mentioned by the commentator is Ishmaʿel, who argues that the prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the prophet Muhammad. Due to a lacuna in the text, it is impossible to determine whether the word is רסול (*rasūl*, 'messenger') or פסול (*pasul*, 'unfit, improper'). The word *pasul* is a widely-attested term for the Prophet Muhammad in medieval Jewish polemical writing (see, for example, Ben-Shammai 1984, 14, no. 47).[31] Furthermore, as in the case of Jesus, who is designated ישו rather than ישוע in this passage, it seems plausible that the commentator (or the copyist) would refer to Muhammad with the derogatory term *pasul*.

Certain biblical verses were interpreted by Muslim authors as predicting the arrival of Muhammad and the rise of Islam. They extensively used the Book of Isaiah as proof (Lazarus-Yafeh 1992, 75–110; Adang 1996, 141–162). The commentator, however, does not discuss those verses from Isaiah that were widely used by Muslim authors; instead, he refutes the Muslim argument by quoting the verses from the same book (Is. 14:13–14) which depict the demise of Hēlēl ben Šāḥar, who was traditionally identified by medieval Jewish commentators as Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,[32] and whom the commentator of the EJP text identifies as the kingdom of Ishmaʿel. This identification is borne out by the following passage:

> *He brings low, he also exalts* (1 Sam. 2:7).[33] The fact that he expelled the Israelites, as he says: *He has thrown down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel* etc. (Lam. 2:1); and that is what the master (*sayyid*,

31   This term also appears in another EJP exegetical text on the Book of Daniel (Shaked 1982, 319).

32   See, for example, R. Saʿadia Gaʾon's mention of the verse in Qafiḥ (1976, 30).

33   1 Sam. 2:7: מַשְׁפִּיל אַף מְרוֹמֵם (*mašpīl ʾap̄ mərōmēm*).

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Moses) said by the Holy Spirit: *The Lord uprooted them from their land in anger* etc. (Deut. 29:27, NRSV 29:28); and they said in (their) prayer: *Because of your indignation and anger* etc. (Ps. 102:11, NRSV 102:10). And in the end, he will expel the kingdom of Ishmaʿel, as he said to him: *How you are fallen from heaven, Hēlēl ben Šāḥar!*[34] etc. (Is. 14:12).[35]

In general, throughout the commentary, Ishmaʿel seems to be identified with Babylon:

But she who has many children is forlorn.[36] It is the kingdom of ʾEdom and Ishmaʿel, for concerning ʾEdom, he said: *And there shall be no survivor of the house of Esau* etc. (Obad. 1:18). And concerning Ishmaʿel, he said: *and I will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, offspring* etc. (Is. 14:22). Because of this he said *but she who has many children is forlorn.*[37]

And about the kingdom of Ishmaʿel, he said: *Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter Babylon! Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter Chaldea! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate* (Is. 47:1).[38]

What is the meaning of saying (lit. 'that he said') *nobles*[39] (Ps. 113:8: נְדִיבִים, *nəḏīḇīm*) again? Why was there a need to say *with the nobles of his people*? Answer: There are (times) when he calls the kingdom of Ishmaʿel *nobles*, as in *the oracle concerning Babylon*, (where) he said: *wave the hand for*

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34   NRSV: 'O Day Star, son of Dawn!'.

35   For the EJP text, see Appendix, V.

36   1 Sam. 2:5: וְרַבַּת בָּנִים אֻמְלָלָה (*wə-rabbaṯ bānīm ʾumlālā*).

37   For the EJP text, see Appendix, VI.

38   For the EJP text, see Appendix, VII.

39   NRSV: 'princes'.

them to enter the gates of the nobles (Is. 13:2). He said: *with the nobles of his people*; He will not seat them, with the kingdom of Ishmaʿel, but *with the nobles of his people*.[40]

In order to support his arguments against Islam, the commentator quotes biblical verses from two prophecies on Babylon from the Book of Isaiah (chaps. 13–14, 47). The commentator's choice of Isaiah's prophecies appears deliberate, since it demonstrates that Isaiah did not foretell the coming of Muhammad, but rather the destruction of Ishmaʿel. Yefet ben ʿEli links these two prophecies to Islam and the Muslims as well. According to Ben-Shammai, chapters 13 and 14 most likely target the house of Muhammad, possibly referring to the Abbasids, whereas chapter 47 contains general accusations against Islam (Ben-Shammai 1977, 319–322; *idem* 1984, 16–18). To the best of my knowledge, other commentators did not interpret the prophecies of Babylon as referring to Ishmaʿel. For example, there is no information concerning Ishmaʿel, Islam, or Islamic rule in the extant fragments of these chapters in R. Saʿadia Gaʾon's commentary on Isaiah (Ratzaby 1993, 170–171, 217).[41]

We have seen several similarities between the arguments presented by the commentator of the EJP text and those of Yefet ben ʿEli. A closer examination shows that Yefet's discussion of the first portion of 1 Sam. 2:3 is not without resemblance to the EJP text. Yefet starts by saying that *talk no more so very proudly* refers to the enemies mentioned in the discussion of the phrase *my mouth derides my enemies* (רָחַב פִּי עַל-אוֹיְבָי, *rāḥaḇ pī ʿal*

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40   For the EJP text, see Appendix, VIII.

41   However, in Gaʾonic literature, the city of Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid caliphate, is occasionally called Babylon. Furthermore, Baghdad was sometimes named *ʿadina* ('delicate'), a title taken from Is. 47:8 (Gil 2004, 492). Perhaps the identification of Babylon with Baghdad led to the association of Babylon with the kingdom of Ishmaʿel.

ʾōyəḇay; 1 Sam. 2:1). The latter phrase refers to the people of Israel, who hear the attacks on the Torah by their enemies but cannot speak the truth because they are in exile. However, when God reveals the truth, the enemies of Israel will acknowledge the truth of their religion and propagate it.[42] Yefet also writes that the meaning of the phrase *Talk no more so very proudly* is to reject haughty (*shāmikh*) words about the Creator and his law.[43] Furthermore, after a discussion of the possible meaning of the word עָתָק (*ʿāṯāq*), Yefet states that the phrase *Talk no more so very proudly* refers to the haughtiness and ridicule (*al-shamkh wa-l-iskhāf*) of three opinions (*aqāwīl*): the opinions of the people of the Trinity (*aṣḥāb al-thālūth*, Christians) concerning the creator itself, the opinions of the *Ḥashwiyya* of

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42   BL Or. 2547, 46r:14–46v:1:

(14) [و]قولها **راحب في عل اويباي** (1 Sam. 2:1) هو في مـ[ـعنى اشتهار] (15) الذين اذ كانوا في الجالية يسمعون الطعن على التورية ولا يقدرون ينـ[ـطقون] (16) بالحق كقوله **[انا]الامتي دوميا هاحشيثي مطوب** (Ps. 39:3; NRSV Ps. 39:2) فاذا اظهر الله [الحق] (17) وانفسد عند الاعدا دينهم [وتحقـقـ]ـوا ان الحق مع يسرايل دون غيرهـ[ـم] (p. 46v, line 1) ذلك الوقت يتكلمون بالدين ويشهروه كما قالوا في هذا المعنى **هامائنتي** (2) **كي اذبير اني عانيثي ماوذ** (Ps. 116:10) فهذا هو معنى **راحب في عل اويباي**.

(14) ... [wa-]qawluhā **rāḥaḇ pī ʿal ʾōyəḇay** (1 Sam. 2:1) huwa fī maʿ[nā ishtihār] (15) alladhīna idh kānū fī l-jāliya yasmaʿūna l-ṭaʿn ʿalā l-tawriya wa-lā yaqdirūna yan[ṭiqūna] (16) bi-l-ḥaqq ka-qawlihi **neʾĕlamtī dūmiyyā heḥĕshĕṭī miṭ-ṭōḇ** (Ps. 39:3; NRSV Ps. 39:2) fa-idhā
aẓhara allāh [al-ḥaqq] (17) wa-infasada ʿinda l-aʿdā dīnuhum [wa-taḥaqqaq]ū anna l-ḥaqq maʿa yisrāyil dūna ghayrihi[m] (p. 46v, line 1) dhālika l-waqt yatakallamūna bi-l-dīn wa-yashharūhu ka-mā qālū fī hādhā l-maʿnā **heʾĕmantī** (2) **kī ʾăḏabbēr ʾănī ʿānīṯī məʾōḏ** (Ps. 116:10) fa-hādhā huwa maʿnā **rāḥaḇ pī ʿal ʾōyəḇay**

43   BL Or. 2547, 47r:10–12:

(10) ... وقالوا **جبوها غبوها** (1 Sam. 2:3) فانكروا الكلام الذي هو (11) شامخ وهذا الكلام هو في معنى الخالق وفي معنى شريعته وقد ذكره (12) اساف بقوله **شتو بشامايم فيهام** (Ps. 73:9) ولذلك قالو **جبوها غبوها** مكرر

(10) wa-qālū **gəḇōhā ḡəḇōhā** (1 Sam. 2:3) fa-ankarū l-kalām alladhī huwa (11) shāmikh wa-hādhā l-kalām huwa fī maʿnā l-khāliq wa-fī maʿnā sharīʿatihi wa-qad dhakarahu (12) Āsāf bi-qawlihi **šattū ḇaš-šāmayim pīhem** (Ps. 73:9) wa-li-dhālika qālū **gəḇōhā ḡəḇōhā** mukarrar

Ishmaʿel[44] (Muslims), and the opinions of those who reject the opinion of the *Ḥashwiyya*, namely the people of unity and justice (*aṣḥāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*, the *Muʿtazila*).[45] All three groups believe that the Torah was abrogated (Ben-Shammai 1977, vol. 1, 30, no. 120).

Yefet's explanation of the first portion of 1 Sam. 2:3 focuses on theological matters, mainly on the abrogation of the Torah. Although the commentator of the EJP text chooses not to do so, his treatment of this passage, i.e. referring to the ambitious pretensions of three different groups, is somewhat similar to that of Yefet. Other commentaries on the Book of Samuel, for instance those of Rashi (d. 1105) and R. David Qimḥi, do not refer to such issues at all. Rashi states that this verse refers to those who become haughty at the time of their good fortune: according to the *pəšaṭ* (plain meaning), Ḥannah refers to Peninnah, Elkanah's other wife, and, according to the *dəraš* (homiletical meaning), Rashi, following the Targum Yonatan, interprets the verse as addressed to Nebuchadnezzar (Cohen 1993, 10). At the same time, R. David Qimḥi interprets it in accordance with its literary and historical context, saying that it is aimed against Peninnah and those who made Ḥannah upset (Cohen 1993, 10).[46]

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44 In Islamic polemical writing, *Ḥashwiyya* is a derogatory term used mainly by rationalists against traditionalist groups, such as *ahl al-ḥadīth*. For more on this term, see Ben-Shammai (2015b, 235, no. 43 with references).

45 The *Muʿtazila* is a theological school that was founded at Basra in the first half of the eighth century and flourished during the early Abbasid period. The proponents of this school argued for the primacy of reason in religion and theology. For further reading, see el-Omari (2016), Bennett (2016), Schmidtke (2016).

46 As stated above, he claims further on in his commentary that most of Ḥannah's prayer is a prophecy concerning the hardships of the people of Israel and their subsequent salvation.

Conclusion

Among the hundreds of pages of the EJP exegetical corpus from the BL and the RNL, there is only one passage which contains a direct polemical discussion aimed against non-Jewish groups. The passage, found in the commentary on the story of Ḥannah, provides a glimpse into the commentator's attitude towards three groups: the advocates of the "foreign sciences" (called here "the astronomers and philosophers of the world"), Christians, and Muslims, who are all criticized by him for their religious beliefs and the investigation of the wonders of creation.

As I have attempted to show, the arguments presented by the commentator of the EJP text are also attested in the writings of other medieval Jewish scholars who wrote in Hebrew and in Judeo-Arabic, in particular Yefet ben ʿEli. It is not clear whether the commentator was Karaite or whether he was able to read Judeo-Arabic. In any case, the examination shows that he could have relied (directly or indirectly) on exegetical literature written in Judeo-Arabic, and especially on Yefet's works. At the same time, the similarities might reflect certain widely known interpretations adhered to by exegetes from various intellectual circles in the medieval Jewish world.

This paper has dealt with only one aspect of the EJP exegetical corpus. Further study of the corpus would undoubtedly contribute to a much better understanding of the literary world and religious thought of Persian-speaking Jews during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, of which too little is known as yet. In this regard, a fruitful path would be a comprehensive and systematic comparison of our corpus with the Karaite and Rabbanite literature written in Hebrew and in Judeo-Arabic; such a comparison would facilitate its proper contextualization and shed light on the exchange of

ideas and the transmission of knowledge between various Jewish groups in the Islamicate world.

Appendix: Excerpts from RNL Yevr.-Arab. I 4608[47]

[I] (11) ... **ותען חנה ות[אמר]**. (12) וגואב דאד חנה וגופת נא סייד זני סכת גֿאן הום מן ונביד ומוסכיר (13) נא הינגיסתום והמי ריזום תהלי[48] גֿאן מרא פא פישי י'י. **ותען חנה**. תא (14) תא גואב [דאדי]שׁ חנה צון שׁ[ניד] אין רא וגופתישׁ לא אדני. בֿ ציז (15) גופתישׁ. יכי גופת נא נא אי סייד נא נא הום מסת. דויום המי כואהום (16) שׁאדי כי [היסת?] ישׂראלן רא וליכין **אשה קשת רוח אנכי**. סכת (17) תהליהא וגמי [היסת] פא דילי מן וכוד **יין** ישׁכיר קפ[49] **לא שתיתי**.   וצון חנה (18) גופת כוישׁתן רא **קשת רוח אנכי.** המצונין גלותיאן רא גופת כי (19) **כאשה עזובה ועצובת רוח קראך י'י ואשת נעורים. כי תמאס אמר** (20) **אלהיך**. וצון כי חנה רא שׁאד כרד י'י המצונין שׁאד כונד י'י אין (21) גלותיאן רא: צֿהֿ[ובני ציון גילי ושמחי וג] **ואשפוך את נפשי לפני י'י.** גופת כי המי ריזום תהלי (22) גֿאן מן רא פישׁי י'י תא מוראדי מן בידהד. המצונין אין גלות[י]אן (23) המי גוינד **אשפוך לפניו שיחי צרתי לפניו וג: אלה אזכרה ואש[פכ]ה** (24) **עלי נפשי כי אעבור וג**: (1v:11–24)

(11) ... **wtʿn ḥnh wt[ʾmr]**. (12) *wgwʾb dʾd ḥnh wgwpt nʾ syyd zny skt gʾʾn hwm hwm mn wnbyd wmwskyr* (13) *nʾ hyngystwm whmy ryzwm thly gʾn mrʾ pʾ pyšy yʾy*. **wtʿn ḥnh**. *tʾ* (14) *tʾ gwʾb [dʾdy]š ḥnh ṣwn š[nyd] ʾyn rʾ wgwptyš lʾ ʾdny. bʾʾ ṣyz* (15) *gwptyš. yky gwpt nʾ nʾ ʾy syyd nʾ nʾ hwm mst. dwywm hmy*

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47   Images of the manuscript are now available online at "Ktiv: the International Collection of Digitized Hebrew Manuscripts" (National Library of Israel in partnership with the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society): http://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/en/ManuScript/Pages/Item.aspx?ItemID=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS000156302.

48   For this word, see Paul (2013, 50).

49   A gloss written in the right margin.

kwʾhwm (16) *šʾdy ky [hyst?] yšrʾln rʾ wlykyn* **ʾšh qšt rwḥ ʾnky**. *skt* (17) *thlyhʾ wgmy [hyst] pʾ dyly mn wkwd* **yyn** *wškr q* **lʾ šty̆ty**.   *wṣwn ḥnh* (18) *gwpt kwyštn rʾ* **qšt rwḥ ʾnky**. *hmṣwnyn glwtyʾn rʾ gwpt ky* (19) **kʾšh ʾzwbh wʾṣwbt rwḥ qrʾk yʾy wʾšt nʿwrym**. **ky tmʾs ʾmr** (20) **ʾlhyk**. *wṣwn ky ḥnh rʾ šʾd krd yʾy hmṣwnyn šʾd kwnd yʾy ʾyn* (21) *glwtyʾn rʾ: ṣʾhʾgʾ* *wbny ṣywn gylw* *wšmḥw wg* **wʾšpwk ʾt npšy lpny yʾy**. *gwpt ky hmy ryzwm thly* (22) *gʾn mn rʾ pyšy yʾy tʾ mwrʾdy mn bydhd. hmṣwnyn ʾyn glwt[y]ʾn* (23) *hmy gwynd* **špwk lpnyw šy̆ḥy̆ ṣrty lpnyw wg**: **ʾlh ʾzkrh wʾš[pk]h** (24) **ʿly npšy ky ʾʾbwr wg**:

[II] (22) ... ורפת [פ]א סוי נימאז כי [...] (23) כרד. וי'י רוח הקודש אברו או אפרוד אברד ואב[ר ד]אשת [... עתיד ...] (24) אבר זואן או רואניסת: **ותתפלל חנה [ותאמר.** וני[מ]א[ז] (25) כרד חנה וגופת ראמישן בוד דילי מן פא י'י בולונד בוד [...]י מן פא [י'י ...] (26) בוד [[מן]] דהן מן אבר דושמנאן מן כי שאד בודום פא פרגי [תו ...] (27) יכי פסוק רא עילימאן[50] אבר חנה המי ניהא[ד]נד כ[י ... סוי ... גופת ...] (28) [...] אין סר תא בון המא עתידות היסת. (3r:22–28)

(22) ... *wrpt [p]ʾ swy nymʾz ky [...]* (23) *krd. wyʾy rwḥ hqwdš ʾbrw ʾw ʾprwd ʾbrd wʾb[r d]ʾšt [... ʿtyd ...]* (24) *ʾbr zwʾn ʾw rwʾnyst:*   **wttpll ḥnh [wtʾmr. wny]m[ʾz]** (25) *krd ḥnh wgwpt rʾmyšn bwd dyly mn pʾ yʾy bwlwnd bwd [...]y mn pʾ [yʾy ...]* (26) *bwd [[mn]] dhn mn ʾbr dwšmnʾn mn ky šʾd bwdwm pʾ prgy [tw ...]* (27) *yky pswq rʾ ʿlymʾn ʾbr ḥnh hmy nyhʾ[d]nd k[y ... swy ... gwpt ...]* (28) *[...] ʾyn sr tʾ bwn hmʾ ʿtydwt hyst.*

[III] (13) ... בידאן כי דיל חנה ראסת בוד ו[אבר] אין ב̈ ציז דאד אוירא. יכי (14) פרזנד. דויום נבואה עתיד.[51] (2r:13–14)

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(13) *… byd'n ky dyl ḥnh r'st bwd w['br] 'yn b" ṣyz d'd 'wyr'. yky* (14) *prznd. dwywm nbw'h 'tyd.*

[IV] (16) **אל תרבו תדברו**. מא בסיאר כ'נית כוניתק52 (17) סכון גויית גשי גשי בולונדי בולונדי ומא בירון הי53 אייד זישתי אז (18) דהן שומא. בידאן כי אין סכון רא גופת חנה אבר ב̅ רוי. יכי. אבר (19) מונג׳ימאן ופילסופֿאן ג׳יהאן כי נא המי וארווינד54 פא נביאים. והמי (20) גוינד כי אפרינישן ג׳יהאן צונין בוד כי נא שאהד55 גופתן וניביסידן. אן כי (21) דויד זישת כרד אין המא רא וגופת **י'י לא גבה לבי ולא רמו עיני** (22) **ולא הלכתי בגדולת**56 **ובנפלאות ממ**׃ כי המי גוינד כי אפתאב רא צנדין (23) היסת דראז־י או: ומאנג רא המי גוינד כי דראז תרֵי אז זמי. ואסתארגאן (24) רא צנדין וצונין המי גוינד. ואבר י'י כי כודאה היסת בסייאר ציזיהא (25) מי גוינד ונא המי וארווינד פא נביאים. ואבר י'י ית׳ שמ̇ אניהא המי גוינד (26) [כי נא] שאהד גופתן. דויום רוי גופת אבר מלכות אדום וישמעאל. כי (27) [אדו]ם המי גויד כי ישו פא אסמאן היסת. והמי גויד כי תא גיהאן בוד (28) [ממ]ל[כ]תי מן בוד. צון גופת **זדון לבך השיאוך שוכני בחגוי [[ה]]סלע אומ̇ וג**57 (29) [ישמע]אל אז אין בתר המי גויד. צונאן כי גופת פא נבואתי ישעיהו (30) [פס]ל58 פידא אייד ואין גויד **ואתה אמרת בלבבך השמים אעלה ממעל** (31) **[לכוכבי] אל ארים כסאי ואשב בהר מועד בירכתי צפֿון. אעלה על במתי** (32) **[עב אדמ]ה לעליון.** ובסייאר ציזיהא גופת כופר. וגופת אסף פא סוי אי[ן] (33) **[ימיקו וידברו] ברע עשק ממקום ידברו.** ומשה גופת פא סוי (p. 4r, line 1) אישאן **יביעו ידברו עתק**

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52   A gloss written in the right margin. The meaning of the letter *qof* is not clear. Perhaps it stands for קרי.

53   For the use of the hortative particle *hē-*, see Shaked (2003, 207); Paul (2013, 122–123).

54   For additional occurrences of *w'rw-* ("to believe") in EJP texts, see Shaked (2003, 215); Paul (2013, 45).

55   See Paul (2013, 49).

56   MT – בְּגְדֹלוֹת (*bi-ḡḏōlōṯ*).

57   MT – זְדוֹן לִבְּךָ הִשִּׁיאֶךָ שֹׁכְנִי בְחַגְוֵי-סֶלַע מְרוֹם שִׁבְתּוֹ אֹמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ מִי יוֹרִדֵנִי אָרֶץ (*zəḏōn libbəḵā hiśśī'eḵā šōḵənī ḇə-ḥaḡwē selaʿ mərōm šiḇtō 'ōmēr bə-libbō mī yōriḏēnī 'āreṣ*).

58   Alternative reading: רס[ו]ל (*rasūl*, "messenger"). See above, p. 22.

יתאמרו כל פעלי און. יצא עתק מ[פיכם]. תפסיר (2) [אוי] **אַל יצא עתק מפיכם**.

(3v:16–4r:2)

(16) **ʾl trbw tdbrw**. mʾ bsyʾr kʷnyt ᵏʷⁿʸᵗ ᵠᵃ (17) skwn gwyyt gšy gšy bwlwndy bwlwndy wmʾ byrwn hy ʾyyd zyšty ʾz (18) dhn šmʾ. bydʾn ky ʾyn skwn rʾ gwpt ḥnh ʾbr bʺ rwy. yky. ʾbr (19) mwngʾymʾn wpylswpʺʾn gʾyhʾn ky nʾ hmy wʾrwyynd pʾ nbyʾym. whmy (20) gwynd ky ʾprynyšn gʾyhʾn ṣwnyn bwd ky nʾ šʾhd gwptn wnybysydn. (21) ʾn ky dwyd zyšt krd ʾyn hmʾ rʾ wgwpt **y'y lʾ gbh lby wlʾ rmw 'yny** (22) **wlʾ hlkty bgdwlt wbnplʾwt mmʾ'**: ky hmy gwynd ky ʾptʾb rʾ ṣndyn (23) hyst drʾzy ʾw: wmʾng rʾ hmy gwynd ky drʾz try ʾz zmy. wʾstʾrgʾn (24) rʾ ṣndyn wṣwnyn hmy gwynd. wʾbr y'y ky kwdʾh hyst bsyyʾr ṣyzyhʾ (25) my gwynd wnʾ hmy wʾrwyynd pʾ nbyʾym. wʾbr y'y ytʾ šmʾ ʾnyhʾ hmy gwynd (26) [ky nʾ] šʾhd gwptn. dwywm rwy gwpt ʾbr mlkwt ʾdwm wyšmʾ'l. ky (27) [ʾdw]m hmy gwyd ky yšw pʾ ʾsmʾn hyst. whmy gwyd ky tʾ gyhʾn bwd (28) [mm]l[k]ty mn bwd. ṣwn gwpt **zdwn lbk hšy'wk šwkny bḥgwy [[h]]slʿ 'wm' wg'** (29) [yšmʾ]ʾl ʾz ʾyn btr hmy gwyd. ṣwnʾn ky gwpt pʾ nbwʾty yšʿyhw (30) [ps]wl pydʾ ʾyyd wʾyn gwyd **w'th 'mrt blbbk hšmym ''lh mmʿl** (31) **[lkwkby] 'l 'rym ks'y w'šb bhr mw'd byrkty ṣp"wn. ''lh 'l bmty** (32) **['b 'dm]h lʿlywn**. wbsyʾr ṣyzyhʾ gwpt kwpr. wgwpt ʾsp pʾ swy ʾy[n] (33) **[ymyqw wydbrw] br' 'šq mmqwm ydbrw**. wmšh gwpt pʾ swy (p. 4r, line 1) ʾyšʾn **yby'w ydbrw 'tq yt'mrw kl p'ly 'wn. yṣ' 'tq m[pykm]**. tpsyr (2) [ʾwy] **'l yṣ' 'tq mpykm**.

[V] (26) … **mšpyl 'p mrwmm**. ʾn ky (27) **ʾbgst yšrʾln rʾ ṣʾhʾ'g' hšlyk mšmym ʾrṣ tpʾrt yšrʾl wgʾ**. wʾn (28) hyst ky syyd pʾ rwḥ hqdš gwpt **wytšm y'y**

[V] (26) ... **משפיל אף מרומם**. אן כי (27) אבגסת ישראלן רא צֹהֹגֹ **השליך משמים ארץ תפארת ישראל וגֹ**. ואן (28) היסת כי סייד פא רוח הקדש גופת **ויתשם יֹי מעל אדמתם באף וגֹ**. (29) וגופתנד פא נימאז **מפני זעמך וקצפך וגֹ**. ופא סרנגאם מלכות ישמעאל (30) [ר]א בי אבגנד. צון גופת אויךא **איך נפלת משמים היליל בן שחר** וגֹ.

(4v:26–30)

mʻl ʾdmtm bʾp wgʾ. (29) *wgwptnd pʾ nymʾz **mpny zʻmk wqṣpk wgʾ.** wpʾ srngʾm mlkwt yšmʻʾl* (30) *[r]ʾ by ʾbgnd. ṣwn gwpt ʾwyrʾ **ʾyk nplt mšmym hylyl bn šḥr wgʾ.***

[VI] (10) ... **ורבת בנים אומללה**. מלכות אדום וישמעאל הסת (11) כי פא סוי אדום גופת **ולא יהיה שריד לבית עשו וג**. ופא סוי ישמעאל גופת (12) **והכרתי לבבל שם ושאר ונין וג**. אבר אין גופת **ורבת בנים אומללה**: (12–10:v4)

(10) ... **wrbt bnym ʾwmllh**. *mlkwt ʾdwm wyšmʻʾl hst* (11) *ky pʾ swy ʾdwm gwpt **wlʾ yhyh šryd lbyt ʻšw wgʾ.** wpʾ swy yšmʻʾl gwpt* (12) **whkrty lbbl šm wšʾr wnyn wgʾ.** *ʾbr ʾyn gwpt **wrbt bnym ʾwmllh**:*

[VII] (13) ... ומלכות ישמעאל רא גופת (14) **רדי ושבי על עפר בתולת בת בבל שבי לארץ אין כסא בתולת בת כשדים** (15) **כי לא יוסיף יקראו לך רכה וענוֹ**: (15–13:r5)

(13) ... *wmlkwt yšmʻʾl rʾ gwpt* (14) **rdy wšby ʻl ʻpr btwlt bt bbl šby lʾrṣ ʾyn ksʾ btwlt bt kšdym** (15) **ky lʾ ywsyp yqrʾw lk rkh wʻnwʾ:**

[VIII] (19) צ׳ מעני כי **נדיבים** גופת אבאז צ׳ המי אבאיסת גופתן **עם נדיבי עמו** (20) גואב כי היסת כי מולכת ישמעאל רא **נדיבים** המי כואנד. צון פא **משא** (21) **בבל** גופת **הניפו יד ויבואו פתחי נדיבים**. גופת **עם נדיבי עמו**. נא אבא (22) מלכות ישמעאל נישאנד אישאן רא. אילא **עם נדיבי עמו**. (22–19:r5)

(19) *ṣʾy mʻny ky **ndybym** gwpt ʾbʾz ṣʾy hmy ʾbʾyst gwptn **ʻm ndyby ʻmw*** (20) *gwʾb ky hyst ky mwlkt yšmʻʾl rʾ **ndybym** hmy kwʾnd. ṣwn pʾ **mšʾ*** (21) **bbl** *gwpt **hnypw yd wybwʾw ptḥy ndybym**. gwpt **ʻm ndyby ʻmw**. nʾ ʾbʾ* (22) *mlkwt yšmʻʾl nyšʾnd ʾyšʾn rʾ. ʾylʾ **ʻm ndyby ʻmw**.*

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Aśu the Convert: A Slave Girl
or a Nāyar Land Owner?

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ABSTRACT   Aśu was a twelfth-century woman from the West Coast of South India. She is mentioned as a Tuḷuva "slave girl" (*šifḥa*) in a deed of manumission authored by Abraham Ben Yijū, a Jewish merchant who lived with her for nearly eighteen years and had children with her. It is thus accepted that Aśu was a manumitted slave. However, there is evidence to the contrary suggesting that Aśu was a member of a matrilineal household of the Nāyar caste of landlords, and that by allying with her, Ben Yijū was establishing a transregional network in collaboration with hinterland Indian merchants. In what follows, I examine the textual evidence from the Cairo Geniza related to the couple and reevaluate it against the anthropological history of Nāyars, especially in relation to their matrilineal inheritance customs and inter-caste matrimonial alliances. Arguably, familial alliances such as those of Aśu and Ben Yijū matured into full-fledged communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the region. A better understanding of the relations between these two individuals, Aśu and Ben Yijū, can shed light on the history of the transregional maritime networks and, consequently, on the history of inter-religious relations in the Malayalam-speaking region.

KEY WORDS   intermarriage; slaves; conversions; premodern Malabar; trade networks

Introduction

Jews and Christians of the Eastern Mediterranean and West Asia were involved in the Indian Ocean trade networks since at least the ninth century CE, as attested by at least one famous Old Malayalam inscription, namely the Kollam copper plates, featuring Muslim, Zoroastrian, Christian, and

Jewish signatories in Kufic, Pahlavi, and Judeo-Persian.[1] However, and unlike the trade networks operating along the land routes connecting West and East Asia (which are more commonly known as the Silk Road), historical sources after the rise of Islam and before the 1500s witness mainly Arabic-speaking Muslims crossing the Arabian Sea to South and Southeast Asia (Foltz 2010, 13; Wink 1996, 65). It was only the discovery of the Cairo Geniza in the late nineteenth century that added a significant body of sources related to Indian Ocean trade and written by non-Muslim Arabs. As the relevant documents are almost exclusively in Judeo-Arabic, they feature mainly Arabic-speaking Jews and their maritime trade activities. We still lack evidence directly attesting to the premodern history of indigenous Jews and Christians of the period, or evidence of West Asian Christians engaged in Indian Ocean trade after the ninth century and before the sixteenth century. Though there are scattered references to Jews and Christians involved in maritime transregional networks across the Arabian Sea and eastwards, evidence for the extent of their involvement is rather circumstantial. Except for one person, who can be identified as a Christian by his name—ʿAbd al-Massiḥ al-Šammas ("The Deacon")[2]—there is no explicit mention of Christians in the Indian Ocean Geniza documents. It stands to reason that Christians did not completely cease their connection with maritime trade eastwards, but the lack of references to Christians in Indian Ocean trade is remarkable even when compared with references to Jewish traders in Muslim sources.[3] It is only towards the decline of the

1   For the Kollam copper plates see Narayanan 1972, 31–7, 86–94; 2013, 343–4; Malekandathil 2010, 39–45; for an extensive survey of previous studies on the Kollam copper plates and a revised reading see Varier and Veluthat 2013.

2   שמשלא חיסמ לא דבע, ʿbd ʾlmsyḥ ʾlšms (TS 18 J 2, f. 7, line 11).

3   For the decline in sources attesting connections between Christians in India, Persia, and West Asia after the ninth century, see Moffett 1991, 269–70. For the material evidence for the involvement of Christians in Indian Ocean trade until the ninth century, see Carter

Arab trade networks during the early modern period and the rise of the European companies across the Indian Ocean Rim that Jewish and Christian communities were "discovered" along the Malabar Coast, a strategic coastline connecting Southwest and Southeast Asia since Greco-Roman times (Gurukkal 2015).

The emergence of Jewish and Christian communities in the region must have been an outcome of intermarriages between merchants and local women during the heydays of premodern Indian Ocean trade. Kerala Jews vehemently deny intermarriages with non-Jewish women as the source of their origin, which is associated with inferior status and used in intra-communal conflicts as the basis for supremacy claims (Segal 1993, 19; Segal 1983; Schorsch 2008). Christians, too, trace their origins elsewhere, as in conversions of upper-caste Brahmins rather than associating their ancestry with merchants marrying local women (Bayly 1984, 178–9, 184 and 184n13). These approaches stand in sharp contrast to Muslims, who explicitly institutionalized intermarriages with local women by the system of temporary marriage (*mut'a*) for the purpose of basing their trade connections across regions (Wink 1996, 71–2; Randathani 2006, 15; Alpers 2014, 58).

The Geniza documents attest conjugal relationships between Jewish merchants and non-Jewish women during their business excursions to the Malabar Coast, though the evidence is rather casual and scarce (Friedman 2010, 171–3). This type of concubinage alliances between merchants and non-Jews is well-known across the Jewish world, as it kept feeding Halakhic debates regarding the legality of such relationships and the religious status of the concubines and their children (Assaf 1965, 230–1). The debates concerned Malabar as well, for in the early sixteenth century, a reponsum

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2008, 33–8. For references to Jews in Malabar in Muslim sources, see Johnson 1975, 21–23.

from Cochin reports of an inner split in the Jewish community there, where a small group of "pure" Jews accused the majority of Jews in the town of being descendants of intermarriage between local slave girls and Jewish merchants from Turkey, Persia, and Yemen (Qastro 1783, responsum 99; Segal 1993, 24–5; Gamliel 2018, 59). The same responsum also contextualizes the accusations in "jealousy and hatred", for the "accused" Jews "are learned in the Torah, rich and close to the royal house and the government. They are also the main negotiators for merchants" (Qastro, 1783, Responsum 99).[4] While surely concubinage with domestic maidservants in overseas market towns was common, there is a rare piece of evidence in the much earlier Geniza suggesting that the closeness to the royal house reported in the sixteenth-century responsum could have been based on conjugal alliances between the West Asian merchants and women of relatively high socioeconomic status. Arguably, evidence in support of this possibility is found in a document attesting the conjugal alliance between a Jewish merchant and an indigenous woman of Malabar in 1132. While the document defines the woman as a slave girl, another document casually refers to the merchant's brother-in-law in Malabar as Nāyar (נאיר, *n'yr*) and as his business associate. The evidence in both documents is thus contradictory, calling for explanation to resolve the discrepancies.

It is important to note right at the outset that the evidence discussed below is not only rare but also too fragmentary and too slim for a comprehensive historical analysis. Nevertheless, it is substantial enough to offer a new perspective for the study of the social history of West Asians

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4   שאלה מהודו מאי קוגי שיש שם כמו תשע מאות בעלי בתים הק' מהם הם יהודים מעיקרא ושורש להם והשאר
הם בני עבדים ובני שפחות והם עשירים ובעלי מצות וצדקה [...] וכל חלקי העכו"ם האלו נתחתנו אלו באלו
והחזיקו בדת ישראל ונעשו קהל גדול בעלי תורה ועשירים וקרובים למלכות והשרים והם עיקר משא ומתן
הסוחרים והיהודים המיוחסים הם להפך שהם המעט ועניים וקורין לאחרים זרע עבדים מצד קנאה ושנאה ואין
מי שיוכל לברר עליהם שהם עבדים.

in medieval Malabar. Most importantly, the twelfth-century evidence of a Jewish merchant cohabitating a South Indian woman is intricately related to several fields of historical research from South Indian society to Mediterranean society to Jewish and Dravidian inheritance customs and to the history of conversions, slavery, intermarriage, and trade guilds in both South and West Asia. It is difficult, even impossible, to do justice to the various related fields in one single study on the narrow and somewhat arbitrary evidence for a twelfth-century mixed couple. However, the present discussion is the first to incorporate the documentary Geniza in the social history of premodern Jews in Kerala. In closely examining the evidence and its historical context, I aim at indicating the implications of this evidence first and foremost on the history of Jewish networks in the region and, by extension, on the interrelated history of Jews and Christians in the region.

Abraham Ben Yijū and Aśu: The Documents

The evidence at hand is drawn from the Geniza "India trade" letters, dated between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. Though mostly dealing with issues related to trade, the documents include occasional references to personal matters, albeit sparingly so. Such references enabled scholars to reconstruct, at least partially, the biographies of several prominent Jewish merchants (Goitein and Friedman 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2013). Perhaps the most detailed biography reconstructed based on the documents is that of Abraham Ben Yijū, a Tunisian Jewish merchant who stayed in South India for nearly eighteen years (ca. 1132–1149). Shelomo Dov Goitein was the first scholar to reconstruct the family history of Ben Yijū, which was later followed up by the novelist Amitav Gosh in a study of Ben Yijū's slave Bama

(Goitein 1973; Ghosh 2002, 168–244). The most complete biography of Ben Yijū, based on Goitein's textual analysis, is published posthumously in the monumental "India Book" completed and supplemented by Mordechai Akiva Friedman (Goitein and Friedman 1999; 2008, 52–89; 2010b). We thus have a considerable amount of information about Ben Yijū; he was born in al-Mahdīya in Tunisia, and his family members—many of them merchants as well—were scattered throughout Tunisia, Sicily, Fustat, Aden, and India. As already mentioned, he settled in South India and established a flourishing business encompassing India, Aden, and Egypt.

The document at the center of the current investigation was found among business letters and accounts written to or by Abraham Ben Yijū. It is a deed of manumission, dated 17/10/1132, attesting the purchase of a slave girl by the name Aśu, her conversion to Judaism, and her manumission by Ben Yijū. Goitein and Friedman assume that the purchase, conversion, and manumission were preplanned by Ben Yijū in order to marry Aśu (2010b, 6–7). Indeed, such practices were common among long-distance trading Jewish merchants, as attested by legal documents of the period (Friedman 1986, 292–6; 2010, 170–1). Ben Yijū, in a move that seems atypical of a Jewish trader in India, decided to return to Aden with his son, Surūr, and daughter, Sitt al-Dār, born to him and to Aśu the convert in India. There is no evidence to the whereabouts of Aśu at the time of return; Aśu might have died prior to Ben Yijū's return to Aden, or she might have simply stayed behind. Besides the deed of manumission, there is only one other laconic and oblique reference to Ben Yijū's wife, not in Mangalore but rather in Jurfatan (גרבתן, *grbtn*), further to the south: "I was told that your wife and

children are in Jurfatan, therefore I sent [letters to you] with the above mentioned [merchant]".[5]

Leaving aside the questions regarding Aśu's background, it is noteworthy that in Aden, Ben Yijū was confronted with allegations that his children were not Jews according to the Halakha, implying that they were not entitled to inherit his enormous wealth. Ben Yijū fiercely resisted these allegations, presumably already before his final departure from Malabar. Evidence for this controversy is found in legal correspondences (responsa) that Ben Yijū wrote regarding the Halakhic status of children born to a Jewish father and a manumitted convert wife. Ben Yijū obliquely refers to himself via the generic character Rəʾuḇen, arguing that Jewish law recognizes children born to a convert wife who had conceived before being manumitted. However, the Halakha forbids intercourse with a slave girl or a non-Jew and marrying her in hindsight. It does, however, rule that in case such a marriage did occur, the husband is not obliged to divorce his wife.[6] Nevertheless, a son born to a slave girl or a gentile woman is not entitled to become his father's heir.[7] More evidence is found in a poem composed by Ben Yijū in honor of his business associate Maḍmūn Ben Ḥasan-Yefet, the head of the Jewish community in Yemen and an influential merchant in his

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5   פקאלו לי אן ביתה ואולאדה פי גרבתן פארסלת מע אלמקדם דכרה (*fqʾlu lī ʾn byth wʾwlʾdh fī grbtn fʾrslt mʿ ʾlmqdm dkrh*, TS Misc. 25, f. 103, lines 27–8, Goitein and Friedman 2010, 150, 153 and 153n24).

6   So according to Mishnah, Yebamoth, 2:8, "He who is said [to have had intercourse] with a slave-girl [before being] manumitted, or a non-Jew [before being] converted - must not enter [marriage alliance with her]. Even if he did enter [a marriage alliance with her], it should not be taken away from him" (הרי – ונתגיירה הנכרית על או ונשתחררה, השפחה על הנטען זה לא יכנוס. ואם כנס – אין מוציאין מידו, *ha-niṭʿan ʾal šifḥa ve-ništaḥrera ʿo ʿal ha-noḵrit ve-nitgayra – hare ze lo yiḵnos. və-ʾim kanas - ʾen moṣiʾin mi-yado*).

7   Maimonides, Mišneh Torah, Naḥalot, 1:7, "His son [born] of a slave-girl or a gentile woman is not considered a son at all and is not entitled to any inheritance (מן או השפחה מן בנו בנו מן השפחה או מן הנכרית אינו בן לדבר מן הדברים ואינו יורש כלל, *bəno min ha-šifḥa ʾo min ha-noḵrit ʾeno bəno lə-daḇar min ha-dəḇarim və-ʾeno yoreš kəlal*).

own right, representative of the Jewish merchants (*nagid*) in Aden. Goitein and Friedman speculate that one of the verses in the poem alludes to the protection provided by Maḍmūn to Ben Yijū in aborting the allegations against him. The responsa documents and the poem are dated to 1140–41, several years before Ben Yijū departs from Malabar with his son and daughter (Goitein and Friedman 2008, 37–47, 73–6; 2010b, 21–4). It is against the backdrop of this controversy that the aforementioned deed of manumission is considered evidence for Aśu being the mother of Ben Yijū's daughter Sitt al-Dār and son Surūr.

Reading the deed of manumission along with other documents related to Ben Yijū's life and business in India raises a few questions regarding the socioeconomic status of Aśu in her South Indian social context. There is reason to assume that Aśu was a member of a family of landowners, which makes it highly improbable that she would have been sold as a maidservant. If this assumption can be substantiated, then her conjugal alliance with Ben Yijū can be understood as instrumental in establishing a trade network based on kinship relations and extending over important port towns across the Arabian Sea, especially along the sea route connecting North Malabar with Aden. In what follows, I examine the related documents separately and in juxtaposition to each other and to the historical background of both Jewish and Dravidian societies.

The Deed of Manumission Revisited

The most informative document related to Aśu is the deed of manumission dated 17/10/1132, a date closely following Ben Yijū's arrival in India.[8] The document plainly states that Aśu is a Tuḷuva (תלוייא, *tlwyʾ*) woman, that is to say, a native of Tulunad, and that she is a convert slave girl.[9] Tulunad is the coastal region in South Karnataka, including the Kasargod district in nowadays north Kerala, with the Arabian Sea to the west and the Western Ghats to the east. The region is named after its dominant and historical language Tulu and it is part of the region designated as Malabar by Arabic speakers since approximately the ninth century. Tulunad shares with historical Kerala certain geographical features, besides being its immediate neighbor to the north; it, too, is delineated by the Western Ghats to the east and the Arabian Sea to the West. This geographical proximity has shaped a distinctive contact zone along the coast, where maritime communities flourished (Vasanthamadhava 1996; Mailaparambil 2011, 11–16). This shared historical, linguistic, and cultural area fostered transregional connections that are important to consider in the context of premodern Jewish networks, such as the one in which Abraham Ben Yijū operated. Arguably, his conjugal relations with Aśu were instrumental in establishing his business network.

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8   The full text, SPIOS D55.10, is in St. Petersburg library. As far as I am aware, no copy of the original is available, except for the transliteration as taken down by Goitein (Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 165–6).

9   Aśu, the Tuḷuva convert slave girl (אשו השפחה הגיורת התלויא , *ʾAšw ha-šifḥa ha-giyoret ha-tuluwiya*ʾ, SPIOS D55.10, line 13). The ethnic term *tuluwiya*ʾ is derived from a combination of *tuḷuva* and the Arabic *nisba* –y with the feminine ending –a.

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Tulu and Malayalam converge into regional dialects at the border lines between South Karnataka and Kerala.[10] While the history of political entities such as royal dynasties is distinctively different, the regions encompassing South Karnataka, or Tulunad, and North Kerala, or Malabar are interconnected and integrated. Along with several other languages such as Kannada and Urdu, Tulu is spoken in the Malayalam-speaking district of Kasargod, the northernmost district of modern Kerala, where some of the most frequented entrepôts of Ben Yijū's times, like Cannannore (Jurfattan?), Dharmmapaṭṭaṇam (Dahfattan), and Vaḷarpaṭṭaṇam (Budfattan), can be identified as medieval port cities known from South Indian history. Ben Yijū used to travel to these port cities for business when he was living in the region. The local network of this Tunisian Jewish merchant extended along the coastline from Mangalore in the north to Dharmmapaṭṭaṇam in the south.[11] It is quite certain that the people with whom the Geniza Arab-speaking merchants came into contact were reasonably versed in both Tulu and Malayalam, for the Geniza documents contain loanwords from both languages (Lambourn 2015). Aśu must have felt at home down south, in the Malayalam-speaking region, or else Maḍmūn Ben Ḥasan Yefet would not have sent letters to Jurfattan, having heard that Ben Yijū's "wife and children" resided there (see fn 5 above). Aśu, therefore, had the status of a woman free to move between different towns regardless of her husband's whereabouts (she could have taken his business letters for him in Jurfattan while he was away). This means that she must have had her own network in a port town other than Mangalore, the port town stated at the outset of

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10   Both Tulu and Malayalam belong to the South-Dravidian language group (Bhadriraju 2003, 20–4).

11   The Southernmost Malabari port city that is mentioned in the Geniza is Kollam. To the best of my knowledge, Abraham Ben Yijū did not go that far south, at least as far as his business letters attest to.

the deed of manumission. Without her husband, she must have relied on kinship connections to reside with her children and even receive letters on his behalf. Moreover, spatial mobility beyond the boundaries of the village and across regions is typical of upper-class people (Miller 1954, 410, 416).

There are a few hints in Aśu's deed of manumission that her status in her society was far from that of a slave. According to Goitein and Friedman (2010b, 165n26), the document diverges from typical deeds of manumission from the Geniza, as when stating that Ben Yijū bought Aśu from her mistress for a significant sum of money: "you, whom I bought for the best of my silver from your mistress home".[12] They also speculate that the deed of manumission was likely intended to certify marriage with the manumitted slave girl, based on several known cases of Jewish India merchants who engaged in conjugal relations with non-Jewish women that were more often than not defined as slave girls or manumitted slave girls (6–7, and note 15). Though Aśu's deed of manumission is phrased in the conventional manner of divorce certificates, it also contains an allusion to formulaic expressions typical of marriage certificates (*kǝtuba*), according to Goitein and Friedman (164; 166n30). Lastly, the document, untypically of deeds of manumission, explicitly states the Hebrew name given to the newly converted slave girl (7; 166n32).[13] These remarkable features of the deed of manumission suggest a divergence, at least to a certain extent, from the common practice of medieval Jewish traders to have non-Jewish concubines defined in the Geniza documents as slave girls or manumitted

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12   דקניתי יתיכי במ[יטב] כספ[י] מבית גברתיך, *dqnyty ytyky bmyṭb kspy mbyt gbrtyk* (SPIOS D55.10. lines 13–14).

13   Craig Perry speculates that the Hebrew name Bǝṟaḵa is a typical name for convert slave girls, though he cites only one other example. A tombstone from Kerala dated 1269 bears the name Sarah Bat Israel. The appellation Bat Israel (Daughter of Israel) suggests that the deceased woman was a convert (Segal 1983, 229).

slave girls (Friedman 1986, 291–339). Moreover, one is obliged to wonder why Aśu was left behind in India while Ben Yijū left with his son and daughter to Aden. There is no evidence that indeed Aśu was left behind; she might have died prior to departure or even joined Ben Yijū without leaving traces in the records. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that Ben Yijū followed the common practice of Jewish and Muslim traders to leave their concubines-cum-slave girls behind upon embarking on their journey back home (Friedman 1990, 99–104). What is less common, though, is the fact that Ben Yijū returned with a son and a daughter born in India and was faced with fierce resistance to have them accepted as Jews and as legal heirs of his property. Thus, the peculiar textual features of the deed of manumission as well as the unique biography of Ben Yijū call for a reevaluation of the conclusion that the deed of manumission represents a maneuver typical of other Jewish traders, namely that Ben Yijū bought a slave girl merely to serve him as a concubine or a wife during his prolonged exile (Goitein and Friedman 1999, 263–4; Friedman 1986, 292–4).

It is therefore possible that Ben Yijū's alliance with Aśu was motivated by concerns exceeding personal needs for domestic help or conjugal delight. Furthermore, it is possible that the alliance was not preceded by the formal agreement attested in the aforementioned document, the deed of manumission, as would have been expected in the context of Eastern Mediterranean arrangements for concubinage (Frenkel 2011, 255–6). Arguably, the alliance with Aśu was primarily intended to establish a kinship-based network through intermarrying into a local family of business partners, as can be gleaned by the reference to Ben Yijū's in-law discussed below. If this is the case, it is difficult to imagine that a conjugal alliance with a slave girl could have been instrumental in establishing connections with business partners in Malabar. Besides these textual hints, there are also contextual reasons to suspect that the term 'slave girl' in Aśu's deed

of manumission is merely a formal term for intra-Jewish legal purposes. Such a claim requires a close reading of the Geniza deed of manumission in juxtaposition to the medieval history of slavery, concubinage, intermarriage, and transregional trade networks in medieval South Asia for viewing Aśu's relationship with Ben Yijū from the perspective of medieval Malabar society.

Firstly, it is doubtful whether the social history of slave girls and conversions in the early medieval Eastern Mediterranean is applicable to contemporaneous South Indian society. For one, there is hardly any evidence, as far as I am aware of, of institutionalized slave markets, where wealthy people could randomly select male or female slaves for domestic service, as those described in Jewish sources relating to the Eastern Mediterranean (Assaf 1965, 223–41; Goitein 2000, 130–47; Frenkel 2011; Perry 2014). While various forms of human enslavement existed, the concept of and terms for slavery, servitude, and serfdom in Dravidian society cannot be indiscriminately equated with terms used in the Mediterranean context, let alone Jewish society. Thus, a well-known form of slavery in medieval South India is that of agrarian serfdom *aṭimai*, a term occurring in Old Malayalam and Tamil inscriptions. Agrarian serfs were bound to the land of their masters. Agrarian serfdom (*aṭimai*) in South Indian society was relegated to land-tilling castes like *pulayar* and *paṟayar*, who were situated already at that period on the lowest grade of the "purity-pollution" standard typical of the region. Serfs of these communities were indeed recruited during the early modern period for church servitude and consequently converted to Christianity.[14] If Aśu's status in Dravidian society

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14   For the emergence of land-tiling castes in premodern Kerala, see Gurukkal 2010, 248–50; For *pulayar* and *paṟayar* being sold to churches and converted to Christianity, see Nair 1986, 14, 17; see also Bayly 1984, 252–3. For agrarian serfdom in Tulunad, (*holeyāḷu* and *heṇṇālu*), see Ramesh 1970, 286. See also the lengthy discussion in Ghosh (2002, 187–207) regarding the South Indian social status of Ben Yijū's slave-servant-agent Bomma..

was that of a slave, she would have belonged to a community of agrarian serfs or landless people who were attached to a certain territory owned by an upper-class household. Such an assumption makes little sense in the case of a foreign trader who states that he bought a single slave girl from a certain mistress, as *aṭimai* was provided on a communal basis and along with a grant (or purchase) of land; a landowner would own an extended family of serfs cultivating his lands and seen as an integral and undivided group.[15] None of the documents related to Ben Yijū conveys any hint that Ben Yijū was granted with land ownership soon after arrival in Malabar.

Another possibility is to assign Aśu the status of concubine, which is a well-documented institutionalized form of court and temple female servants, or courtesans and *devadāsi*s, "God's maidservants", respectively. However, courtesans and *devadāsi*s were attached to a temple or a royal court (Ali 2006, 45–6; Orr 2001, 211–5). Moreover, due to the rules of purity and pollution that were undoubtedly at play during the time, domestic servitude could not have been performed by women of the so-called slave castes. Under these circumstances, the words of Ben Yijū in the deed of manumission, addressing Aśu as a slave girl (*šifḥa*) purchased "from the house of your mistress", suggest that Aśu was of a relatively high status. It is doubtful, therefore, that she would have been designated a "slave" in a sense similar to that of the term in contemporaneous Mediterranean society.

In any case, the purchase of a woman by a foreign merchant from an agrarian community or from a temple is at odds with what is known about the economy and society of the region at that period. There are no documents related to the sale or purchase of slaves in South India

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15   According to Daud Ali, in early medieval South India "the majority of references to slavery are not connected to the transfer of men and women between landowners" (Ali 2006, 45).

during the early medieval period, though that in itself does not rule out the possibility that slave trade was conducted at the time in the region as much as it was in the Mediterranean. Studies on slavery in India reveal a picture different from that emerging from the Mediterranean, where slaves were commodified in institutionalized forms such as slave markets (Goitein 1967, 130–47; Friedman 1986, 291–339; Frenkel 2011; Perry 2014). As already stated, slavery in South India is closely related to agrestic serfdom, on the one hand, and to captives of war, on the other (Ali 2006, 44–6; Subbarayalu 2012, 156–9). While there is evidence for Indian slaves being sold in Western and Central Asian markets (Perry 2014, 39), it is unclear where in India they were purchased and under which "market conditions" precisely. There is no evidence in the Geniza documents, or in medieval South Indian sources, that slave markets operated in the West Coast of South India, where Aśu's purchase (if indeed it was a purchase) is recorded. Though maidservants, such as the *peṇṭātti* in the Coḻa court (Ali 2006, 50), for instance, are recorded in historical documents, their status is of domestic personnel rather than a product for sale. It is possible, despite the lack of recorded evidence, that *peṇṭātti*s were acquired by purchase; nevertheless, such female slaves were dissociated, according to existing records, from any natal or conjugal kinship (56).

It may of course be the case that Aśu's deed of manumission bears testimony to slave markets operating in twelfth-century Malabar, despite the lack of evidence of such markets in premodern South India. However, in light of the documented history of the economy of human labor and the social status of women in Dravidian society, Aśu's deed of manumission can be "translated", so to speak, to the social reality as depicted in relevant studies. Firstly, the "transaction" can be reevaluated based on Ben Yijū's explicit statement that it is from the house of her mistress that he "bought"

Aśu.[16] In twelfth-century Malabar, that meant that Aśu must have belonged to a matrilineal household managed and owned by a woman, whether as a domestic servant or as a family member.[17] During the same time period in the Eastern Mediterranean, the meaning would be that the domestic servant of one lady was transferred to another household. Secondly, an implication of moving from a certain house to Ben Yijū's ownership could be understood as demarcating the conjugal alliance with Aśu from the Muslim establishment of *mutʿa*, or temporary marriage, usually with women of fishermen settled along the coast (Wink 1996, 71; 1997, 268; Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 163). Clearly, Ben Yijū intended a long-term relationship with the convert "slave girl", at least as expressed in the deed of manumission. This intention of his would be in line with the much stricter approach to concubinage and legitimate conjugal alliance with non-Jewish women in Jewish law that is more flexible when the non-Jewish woman is a manumitted slave.[18]

The assumption that Aśu was indeed precisely what one would expect of women in the status of slavery led Goitein to read and interpret the name Aśu as derived from the Sanskrit adverb *aśu*, "quick", based on a similar name, Ḥidhq (حذق), "dexterity", given to a Nubian slave girl in the Mediterranean. However, this analogy with Aśu seems awkward, as the Sanskrit adverb *aśu*, "quickly", is unlikely to be given as a name for a lady, regardless of her socioeconomic status (Goitein and Friedman 1999, 263 and 263n17; 2008, 55–6). It is more likely that Aśu is an abbreviation of a

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16   מבית גברתיך, *mbyt gbrtyk* (SPIOS D 55, lines 13–14).

17   For Matrilineality in Kerala (*marumakkattāyam*), see Narayanan 2013, 270; 292n67; for Matrilineality in Tulunad (*aḷiyasantāna*), see Ramesh 1970, 280; cf. Orr 2001, 222–8.

18   See discussion above and notes 6 and 7. See also Friedman 1986, 291–2; Perry 2017.

longer name or, alternately, a "pet name", typically ending in the vowel /u/.[19] It may also be the case that the letter /ś/ stands for a Dravidian /c/, as sibilants are foreign to the phonemic system of Dravidian languages, and the unvoiced palatal is unrealized in the Hebrew and Arabic scripts. These are, of course, speculations, but they better fit with the reality of names in medieval Malabar than the etymology based on analogy with an utterly different language and culture.

That said, the Geniza documents do provide scanty evidence to justify the assumption that foreign traders would buy slaves in India. The more common practice prevalent in Indian Ocean trade, however, would have been to export slaves to India along the maritime trade routes rather than the other way around (Pouwels 2002). Another piece of evidence is found in documents reporting the sale of Indian slaves in Mediterranean markets. Indian slaves are a minority in this context, and they are not specified for the exact region in India from which they were brought (Goitein 1967, 133, 138; cf. Perry 2014, 39). There is one case attested, apart from Ben Yijū, in which a Jewish trader marries an Indian slave girl, and in that case as well the term slave girl might have been used for legitimizing cohabitation with a local woman (Friedman 1986, 294–6; 2010, 170–2). Naturally, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that Ben Yijū indeed bought a slave girl solely on the basis of lack of evidence for slave markets in twelfth-century Malabar. Nevertheless, the peculiarities of the document pointed out by Goitein and Friedman, the trouble that Ben Yijū went through to legitimize the union with Aśu, and the facts known about slaves and their status

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19   As, for example, common female "pet names" like Amu, or Añju, which is abbreviated from Añjali. M. G. S. Narayanan suggested in a personal communication that Aśu is derived from Aśvati, the Malayalam name corresponding to Sanskrit Aśvinī and the name of a lunar mansion roughly corresponding to the Aries constellation. For this reason, I transliterate her name as derived from a South Indian language rather than representing the Judeo-Arabic spelling אשו, *Ašū*.

in the region at that period altogether warn against taking the deed of manumission at its face value.

Whether Aśu was a domestic servant, a "gift" to a foreign merchant, or a member of a matrilineal household, the "transaction" cannot be taken too lightly as a matter of convenience for the foreign trader; there must have been an additional interest, other than financial profit, on part of the mistress's household to engage in the transaction. Before turning to more evidence and, consequently, to speculations on the way in which Aśu and her mistress considered the transaction, it is, perhaps, more crucial to understand why Ben Yijū attributed the degrading status of a slave girl to his wife and mother of children even if she was not perceived as such by her own people. One obvious conclusion is that the attribute "slave girl" (*šifḥa*, שפחה) must have been ascribed by Ben Yijū in the legal deed for validating her conversion rather than for reflecting a reality of women sold as slaves to foreign merchants in a local labor market. Indeed, the period witnessed ample Halakhic discussions and queries on the topic, and, as discussed above, Ben Yijū, too, engaged in responsa on the subject, probably to validate his conjugal relations with Aśu in hindsight. Jewish householders, especially merchants travelling on business overseas, were inclined to enter relationships with slave-concubines, despite the negative light in which such relationships were viewed by Halakhic authorities (Friedman 1985, 11; 1986, 291–339; 2010).

As already noted above, the Muslim legal system allowing for ad-hoc intermarriage (*mutʻa*) in Malabar did not apply to the legal situation of Jewish merchants. For one, Jewish males were prohibited from having sexual intercourse with female slaves, be they Jewish or not. Prohibition aside, such practices persisted among Jewish men and were even tolerated to a certain extent under the influence of concubinage in Islam that was legitimized as *mutʻa* marriage (Friedman 1990; Perry 2017, 148). But a

Jew wishing to marry a convert would face another obstacle, which was to prove that the conversion was not forced or opportunistic. For that reason, a rabbinic court of law consisting of three witnesses (adult male Jews) was required for passing judgment regarding the validity of the conversion (Segal 2014, 595).[20] It is highly unlikely that there were enough Jews (if any at all) in Mangalore in October 1132 to witness and approve the conversion of Aśu. Under these circumstances, the conversion of a woman to Judaism in a distant land, with no Jewish witnesses available for supervising her conversion, could be legitimized only in case she was a slave girl (Goitein and Friedman 1999, 266). In other words, to marry a convert, the convert must have been a freed person prior to the conversion, which, in turn, must have taken place prior to the intention to marry. On the other hand, a Jewish householder had to convert his male and female slaves in order to employ them in his house. In such cases, the process was much simplified, involving immersion in water and teaching of basic Jewish law by the slave owner. It seems, therefore, that Ben Yijū had no other recourse but to claim that Aśu was bought as a slave girl before being converted.[21]

But there may be additional, perhaps more subtle, reasons underlying the formulation of the document as a deed of manumission, conversion, and, by extension, marriage as well. Goitein and Friedman note the remarkable formula of recognition called *rašut* (רשות) used by Ben Yijū right at the outset of the document as is customary in important documents for subjugating a certain legal deed to a living rabbinic authority. Ben Yijū uses

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20 See also Bavli, Yebamoth, 46b: "a convert requires three [witnesses] (גר צריך שלושה, *ger ṣarīḵ šəloša*)".

21 Compare with the case of Bustana'i Ben Ḥaninai, the semi-legendary seventh-century Exilarch in Baylon, who married a captive Persian princess as a gift by the Caliph of Baghdād. Their sons were later condemned as slaves unentitled to inherit their father (Assaf 1965, 231; for the responsa dealing with Bustana'i found in the Geniza, see Schechter 1902, 242–7).

a double *rašut* invoking two authorities, the Exilarch Daniʾel Ben Ḥisdaʾi of Baghdād and Gaʾon Maṣliaḥ, the head of the Palestinian academy in Cairo. Remarkably, this double *rašut* signifies the jurisprudent adherence to the Yemenite Jewish legal system. The inclusion of India in the Halakhic jurisprudence of Yemen is reiterated in several other references in medieval rabbinic literature (2008, 633–4; 2010b, 162–4). Ostensibly, Ben Yijū and Aśu formed a nodal point in a Jewish legal network connecting India with Yemen, Baghdād, and Cairo in a shared Jewish legal system. This is an essential and crucial strategy in forming transregional networks, more visibly so in the case of Islamic legal networks across South and Southeast Asia.[22] There are a few scattered textual references to a rabbinic court of law in India equating India with Aden as one and the same legislative zone (Goitein and Friedman 2010a, 90–91, and n14). The only evidence for a court of law, possibly of a transient nature, refers to Broach, which is a port town in Gujarat. Though the reference was identified as written by Ben Yijū, the time and place remain unclear, apart from the reported ruling (מעשה, *maʿase*) being brought before Ben Yijū from Broach (2010b, 281–2). Though this does not substantiate an autonomous authority of Jewish law in India, it shows the attempts by Ben Yijū, and possibly by other Jewish merchants as well, to establish a legal network for Jews in India.

To summarize, the deed of conversion and manumission of Aśu defines her as a slave girl possibly in reaction to allegations against the Jewish pedigree of Ben Yijū's children born to her. Had the allegations been accepted, the children would have been dispossessed of their father's inheritance. If the deed of manumission was written in response to the

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22   For the Jewish legal network in South Asia, see Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 163–4; cf. Mahmood Kooria (2016) for a recent study on Islamic legal networks across the Indian Ocean; see also Elizabeth Lambourn (2008) for the medieval *ḵuṭbah* networks between Aden and the West Coast of India.

allegations and in hindsight, then the simplest way for Ben Yijū to argue for the proper conversion of his wife would be to ascribe the status of a slave girl to her in the document.

Who Was This Nāyar?

The main reason for speculating that Aśu was not a slave is the reference to one Nāyar whom Ben Yijū refers to as his in-law (ṣihr, צהר, Arabic صِهر), thus implying that this Nāyar is Aśu's brother.[23] Nāyar is a caste-name designating a member of the military and ruling clans (Narayanan 2013, 273–4). Since Ben Yijū refers to him as his in-law (ṣihr-i, with the first person possessive suffix -i), it stands to reason that the relationship by marriage between Ben Yijū and that Nāyar were derived through Ben Yijū's conjugal alliance with Aśu, the mother of his children. That being the case, it is difficult to imagine that the reference to Aśu as a slave girl had any substance in her own society, for her kin—most probably her brother—was a member of an elite group and a business associate of her husband.

The discrepancy between a Nāyar brother-in-law and a wife purchased as a slave was first noted by Shirley Isenberg, an anthropologist studying the Jews of India (1988, 29–30n19). Isenberg notes that Nāyar is a name signifying upper-class people in the Malayalam-speaking region to this day. Ruling out the possibility that the sister of a Nāyar would be a slave, she postulates that Ben Yijū must have married another woman

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23 אלי נאיר צהרי ענדי דינ' ואחד ('ly n'yr ṣhri 'ndi dyn' w'ḥd), "I owe my brother-in-law Nāyar one dinar" (TS 20.137, line 2.6). The term ṣihr refers to in-law in general, and may be either father-in-law, brother-in-law or son-in-law. In the case of Aśu, an in-law through matrimonial alliance to her could only be her brother, for nāyars follow a matrilineal system, where the brother is of more significance to the woman's kinship relations than the father (Gough 1961, 352–4).

of Nāyar ancestry. She also remarks that the caste system forbids such intermarriages, and that both the brother and the sister would have been obliged to convert to Judaism for escaping excommunication and ostracization by their own community.

Notwithstanding the current attitudes towards inter-caste marriage, there is evidence that caste identity and ethnicity were rather fluid over the ages, with marital relations often defined as acceptable or not based on economic and political interests (Freeman 1999, 282–3; Sharma 1992, 185–6; Durga 2001, 152). Moreover, the caste name Nāyar is generically broad; it refers to a variety of caste identities with various degrees of proximity to the foreign traders who frequented or settled on the Malabar Coast over the centuries (Ayyar 1938, 50; Fuller 1975, 286–7). It is possible that the foreign traders, at least in the coastal regions that depended on overseas trade like the Malabar Coast, were endowed with a status that would be considered equal to that of indigenous trading communities. Especially in the region of North Malabar, which is less favorable to land cultivation, the increased dependence on maritime trade resulted in more favorable sociopolitical terms to foreign traders (Mailaparambil 2011, 11–12). Moreover, had the Nāyar and his sister, Ben Yijū's wife, been, as Isenberg postulates, excommunicated on the pretext of undesirable inter-caste marriage, it is unlikely that Ben Yijū would have been able to maintain his Indian business network, which embraced quite a few Indian associates. Lastly, the reference to Aśu as Ben Yijū's wife in the letter mentioned above (fn 5) makes the assumption that Ben Yijū had one slave wife and one Nāyar wife less likely, for the deed of manumission was clearly written in an attempt to legitimize the conjugal alliance with Aśu precisely because she was the mother of his children.

There is at least one more inscriptional reference supporting the possibility that foreign traders of the period would be endowed a caste status

eligible for intermarriage with Nāyars. An Old Malayalam inscription dated to the eleventh century mentions a foreign merchant, possibly a Jew, as entitled to honorary rights and caste status which parallels that of the ruling Nāyar castes in Central Kerala. It is especially striking that the inscription ordains the honorary rights as hereditary not only via the foreigner's male offspring but also via matrilineal descent (*marumakkattāyam*, "inheritance via sister's son"). This eleventh-century inscription (also known as the Jewish copper plates) granted to one Joseph Rabban (*īsuppu irappāṉ*) and to his nephews and sons-in-law (besides his sons and daughters)[24] is considered as the fundamental piece of evidence for the origin of Jews in the region, albeit the latter denying intermarriages with non-Jewish women. However, the inscription does not specify the beneficiary as a Jew or as related via marriage to the donor. Nevertheless, complemented by the documents left by Ben Yijū, this inscriptional reference strengthens the plausibility of matrilineal alliances in the early medieval period between Nāyars and foreign West Asian merchants.[25]

24　"To Joseph Rabban, proprietor of Añcuvaṇṇam, his male and female issues, nephews, and sons-in-law, Añcuvaṇṇam shall belong by hereditary succession. Añcuvaṇṇam shall belong to them by hereditary succession as long as the world, sun and moon endure." (*añcuvaṇṇam-uṭaiya īsuppu iṟappāṉukkum ivaṉ santati āṉ-makkaḷkkum peṇ-makkaḷkkum ivaṉ marumakkaḷkkum peṇ-makkaḷai koṇṭa marumakkaḷkkum santati pirakiriti ulakum cantiranum uḷḷ-aḷavum añcuvaṇṇam santatip pirakiriti*). Text and translation in Narayanan 1972, 80–1. Narayanan explains the term *peṇ-makkaḷai koṇṭa marumakkaḷ*, "sons-in-law via the daughters" as follows: "This term literally means nephews by marriage. The term *marumakkaḷ* is used in Malayalam for nephews and sons-in-law alike. It was customary in Kerala for the male to marry the daughter of his uncle. In fact it was almost the right for the male. The specific statement that nephews inherited the title of Ancuvannam shows that the matrilineal order of succession was prevalent in Kerala and it was also accepted by the Jewish settlers in Kerala" (82).

25　For the Jewish copper plates, see Narayanan 1972, 23–8, and 2009. For Muslim-Nāyar intermarriages, see Gough 1961, 418; Miller 1954, 417.

That said, Aśu's regional identity, defined as Tuḷu in the deed of manumission, further complicates the matter; if her brother was a Nāyar, he must have been a Tuḷu man (for she was a Tuḷu woman), but Nāyars are associated with the Malayalam-speaking region. Furthermore, while there is inscriptional evidence in Old Malayalam since the ninth century for the emergence of the Nāyar class, first as warriors and chieftains and, later on in the post-Cera period (ca. 1100s), as landowners, there is no equally concrete evidence that Nāyars emerged as a landowning caste in Tulunad. Nevertheless and despite the fact that there are currently no Tulu-speaking Nāyars, there is evidence that Nāyars were associated with Tulunad in the past (Narayanan 2013, 273–4). There are several inscriptions found in the coastal region that lies between Kasaragod (in northen Kerala) and Mangalore (in southern Karnataka) that mention Nāyars, Brahmins (Nambis), and merchants (Seṭṭis and others) as Malayali migrants to Tulunad, some as donors to temples or as officials nominated over temples, others as beneficiaries of land grants or as in-laws of Tuḷu people (Vasanthamadhava 1996, 939–44). Interestingly, ethno-historical accounts echo this inscriptional evidence in the textual heritage of the rulers of Calicut integrating the legendary history of Kerala with Tulunad (Logan 2000 [1887], 227–9; Menon 2003, 27, 39; Veluthat 2009, 135). The Judeo-Arabic documents thus further attest to the sociocultural continuity between the Malayalam-speaking region and Tulunad, and the compatibility of Tuḷu identity and Nāyar status in the twelfth century. The document listing Nāyar the brother-in-law and the document ascribing Aśu a Tuḷu identity both portray a group of Tuḷu Nāyar. The connection with Tulunad goes beyond Aśu's regional affiliation; Ben Yijū established his bronze workshop in Mangalore, an important port town located in Tulunad (Goitein and Friedman 2008, 58–9; 2010b, 8–9, 177–9). It is highly improbable, therefore, that Ben Yijū bought the sister of his business associate as a

slave. Under these circumstances, his exceptional choice of words and terms in phrasing of the deed of conversion and manumission betrays the awkwardness of designating Aśu as a manumitted convert slave (Goitein and Friedman 1999, 264, 278–79).

It should be reiterated that the Geniza documents related to Ben Yijū merely represent arbitrary and fragmentary pieces of information about his life and family relations. However, upon examining the references to Nāyar against the backdrop of Indian Ocean maritime trade and the sociopolitical conditions prevalent along the Malabar Coast at the time, the most reasonable assumption would be that Nāyar was indeed Aśu's brother, and that the conjugal alliance with her was instrumental in forming the business partnership between the two men. As already noted above, the crucial difference between slaves and freed people in medieval South India was land ownership (Gurukkal 2010, 221; Ali 2006, 45). Thus, the socioeconomic status of a slave as equivalent to that in the Mediterranean in the sense of those dispossessed would be translatable to agrestic slavery (*aṭimai*), as of a land cultivator or tenant. If indeed Aśu was a Nāyar lady, she also had her share of land in her matrilineal ancestral property (Gough 1961, 334, 390–93). Therefore, it is justified to question the meaning in usage of the Jewish term slave girl (שפחה) and its applicability in the socioeconomic context in Malabar at the time.

Two Nāyars and Two Brothers-in-Law

There are two references that complicate the identification of that Nāyar as Aśu's brother and Ben Yijū's brother-in-law. Two personalities referred to by Ben Yijū overlap with that Nāyar; one is another in-law called Abū ʿAlī, who is mentioned once in a document listing the donors of oil to a

synagogue in Fusṭāṭ in 1153–1156.[26] The other overlapping figure is also called Nāyar, but this Nāyar is defined as the brother of the *kārdār*, "manager" (*ʾk̲w ʾlkʾrdʾr*, אכו אלכארדאר), who was trading in cardamom.[27] Since the name Nāyar, like many other names of South Indian origins, even to this day, is derived from the person's caste affiliation, identifying his relation to Ben Yijū is crucial in determining whether Aśu's status as a slave girl in the deed of manumission can be understood as merely a formally legal designation. However, to conclude that this is indeed the case, we must first examine the references to that Nāyar and rule out the various speculations brought forward by Goitein and Friedman in order to resolve the seeming contradiction between the low-status wife and the elite brother-in-law and business partner.

Based on Ben Yijū's reference to Abū ʿAlī as his in-law (*ṣihr-i*), Goitein and Friedman postulate that the in-law called Nāyar and the in-law called Abū ʿAlī might be one and the same person, and that, consequently, the spelling n-ʾ-y-r might stand for an Indian Jewish name, albeit being unattested elsewhere. Considering that the two may not be the same person, Goitein and Friedman raise another possibility, namely that Ben Yijū might have married another woman, a Jew, in India or in Yemen, whose brother is the aforementioned ʾAbu ʿAlī. Another plausible speculation, as Goitein and Friedman also note, is that the term *ṣihr* (صِهر) used in each case denotes different in-law relations, as *ṣihr* may stand for a brother-in-law, a son-in-law, or a father-in-law. Considering the polysemic nature of

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26   TS 10 K 20 f. I line 2. See also Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 378–9.

27   בקו אלי נאיר אכו אלכארדאר ענדי ג דראהם פיליא בקיה תמן אל פופל אל אחמר ואל אביץ (*bqw ʾly nʾyr aḵw ʾl-kʾrdʾr ʿndi drhʾm fylyʾ bqyh tmn ʾl-fwfl ʾl-ḥmr w-ʾl-ʾbyṣ*), "The remainder of what I owe Nāyar, the brother of the Kārdār, is 3 *dirham*s *filiya* (< *pala*, a measure of weight in Tulu), the remainder of the fee for the red and white pepper" (TS NS J10 r. margins line 1. See also Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 11–12; 2008, 62–3, 556–7, 617 (TS 12.320 lines 13–17).

the term, it is reasonable to assume that Nāyar and ʾAbu ʿAlī are two different and unrelated people (Goitein and Friedman 2008, 639n17; 2010b, 379n3). This is quite sensible, for the document in which Abū ʿAlī is mentioned belongs to a different phase in Ben Yijū's life, sometime in 1153–1156, some four to seven years after Ben Yijū left India and sometime after leaving Aden and resettling in Egypt.

As for Nāyar the brother of the *kārdār*, Goitein and Friedman rule out the possibility that Nāyar the brother-in-law and Nāyar the brother of the *kārdār* both refer to one and the same person. They assume that Ben Yijū would not have referred to the same person once as his brother-in-law and then again as the brother of a business associate who was blamed in several correspondences for much trouble and great losses (173n26). While it does sound awkward to refer to the same Nāyar once by the attribute brother-in-law (namely, Aśu's brother) and once by the attribute "brother of the *kārdār*", in the context of matrilineal kinship relations it makes sense. In contrast to Goitein and Friedman, Roxani Margariti, following Amitav Ghosh, does not rule out the possibility that the *kārdār* was indeed related to Ben Yijū through marriage based on the cross-references to Nāyar once as Ben Yijū's brother-in-law and once as the brother of the *kārdār* (Ghosh 2002, 214–16; Margariti 2007, 205, 305n130). Considering the family relations in the matrilineal household, the brother-in-law Nāyar and the *kārdār's* brother Nāyar could very well be one and the same person. Nāyar could have been Aśu's brother from her mother's side, hence both living off the same ancestral land. At the same time, he could have had a half-brother from his father's side, and consequently from a different Nāyar clan, not directly related to Aśu.

Indeed, the *kārdār* was a dubious character in Ben Yijū's life, a business associate who failed to deliver a shipment of cardamom for an advanced

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payment handed to Ben Yijū by his Jewish business associates in Aden.[28] In a letter from Aden sent sometime between 1137 and 1140, Joseph Ben Abraham, a Jewish business associate of Ben Yijū, mentions the *kārdār* with explicit anger, urging Ben Yijū to pressure the debtor to pay his debt.[29] In another letter sent to Ben Yijū in 1146, the merchant Khalaf Ben Isaac refers again to the *kārdār*'s mischief, but this time the anger is directed against Ben Yijū, for Khalaf demands that Ben Yijū take the responsibility for the undelivered goods.[30] Clearly, Ben Yijū did not take any action against the *kārdār*, as requested by Joseph some six to nine years prior to Khalaf's letter. He was finally prompted to pay for the loss of cardamom shipment from his own pocket. An oblique kinship relation to the *kārdār* through his

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28 Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 11–12, 66, 71–2, 112, 114–5, 144–5, 169–70, 175; for discussion on the letters exchange regarding the dispute see Margariti 2007, 204–5.

29 דכר מולאי לחאל אלכארדאל ומולאי יתלטף בה ויסתכלץ לנא מנה תהדדה מולאי באן נחן נשמת פי עדן כל מן לנא ענדה שי ולא יופינא איאה פלעל יפזע מו אלשמאת ואן לם ידפע לנא שי ואלא כתבנא כתאב שמאת חקיק [[ואאנפדאה]] ואנפדנאה אליה חתא יקף עלי סכאמה. TS 12.320 v. lines 13–17. "You, my master, mentioned the affair of the *kārdāl*. You approach him, my master, with wily graciousness and ask him to pay us. My master, were you to threaten him that we excommunicate in Aden whoever does not pay a debt to us, perhaps he should fear the excommunication. If he does not deliver anything to us, we shall write a real letter of excommunication and send it to him, until he attends to his disgraceful behavior" (translation by Goitein and Friedman 2008, 556–7).

30 ואמא מן אגל אלהיל אלדי ענד אלכארדאר לענה אללה פאני תכלמת מע בעץ אלנאס בדלך פדכר לי אן אלהיל לכאצתך ומא לנא פיה שי ואנמא כאן בינך ובין אלכארדאר מעאמלה ואנכסר עליה הדא אלשי פרדיתא לנא לאן עבדך ינפד יעול עליך בשרא שי הו וסואה ושי לא יחתאג אלא מעארצה ולא אלי תקדמה אלא שי נאץ פאן סהל אלשרא ואלא תרך TS 18 J 4, f. 18 lines 26 – 31 (text in Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 141). "Concerning the cardamom owed by the *kārdār* – May God curse him! – I spoke with someone about this, and he told me that the cardamom actually was on your account, and we had nothing to do with it {lit., "was exclusively for you and we have no share in it"}. You had made a transaction with the *kārdār* in which your share was lost {alt. tr.: and he defaulted on it}, whereupon you charged it to us. However, as do others, your servant sends you consignments, relying on you to buy merchandise that needs no bartering or advance, but an available commodity, which, if its purchase is convenient, fine, and if not, it should be abandoned" (translation by Goitein and Friedman 2008, 617).

brother-in-law Nāyar might explain both Ben Yijū's trust and his inability to react against the debtor for so many years.

I am, therefore, inclined to agree with Margariti that the two seemingly contradictory references to Nāyar refer to the same person, precisely because the *kārdār* was the source of troubles to Ben Yijū. A close reading of the references to the *kārdār* reveals tolerance on the part of Ben Yijū and even reluctance to act against him despite repeated requests of his Jewish partners in Aden to do so. The reason for this extensive tolerance may very well be the kinship relations through Nāyar the brother-in-law. Ben Yijū also had a problematic brother, Meḇaser, who is referred to in several letters from and to Ben Yijū and who is once blamed by Ben Yijū for being lazy and difficult (Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 20, 158, 223, 229). Tolerance towards unreliable business partners is understandable in the context of family relations. Aśu's relations through her brother Nāyar to the extensive network of inland merchants like the *kārdār* simply makes her more desirable for kinship alliance in the eyes of a foreign trader interested in building up a transregional trade network.

The extent of business relations branching out of the alliance between the Nāyar household and Ben Yijū is evident in his draft of accounts mentioning Nāyar "my brother-in-law" (נאיר צהרי, *n'yr ṣhri*).[31] Though there is nothing personal in this list of accounts, it constitutes a remarkable attestation for Ben Yijū's intricate human connections in India. Like Nāyar, some other names in the document are specified also for their kinship relation with Ben Yijū or, alternately, for their business affiliation with him.

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31   Friedman postulates that the accounts must have been written either between the years 1136–1139 or 1145–1149, based on the fact that the accounts were scribbled on the back page of a letter sent from Aden to India in 1135 and on other dated documents relating to the periods in which Ben Yijū lived in India (Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 168; The document TS 20.137 is transliterated and translated to Hebrew, 168–79.

Thus, Ben Yijū owes three dirhams and half a *fāj* (a small Indian coin, Friedman 2016, 685) to one Yosef, the maternal uncle of his workers, who were considered too young to handle their wages. Ben Yijū is also indebted to his maternal aunt's son, Abū l-Ḵayr Ibn al-Minqār. One Nākhudā Saʿd is referred to as a brother (*ʾl-ʾḵ*), preceding an honorific "my master" (*mwlʾy*). The attribute "brother" shows that Ben Yijū considered him a close friend rather than suggesting kin relations between the two (Goitein and Friedman 2010b, 174n34). Still, the insertion of a kinship term underlines the nature of relations associated with the business network in which Ben Yijū was a nodal figure; as much as it is a multi-ethnic and transregional network, it is based—at least partially—on kinship relations.

Another document referencing the unique business connections of Ben Yijū in South India is a letter sent by Maḍmūn Ben Ḥassan from Aden to Mangalore. The letter is a business letter typical of the correspondences between Jewish traders involved in the Indian Ocean trade. It contains a less typical request to convey Maḍmūn's warm regards to three Indian associates of Ben Yijū in Mangalore, namely Sūs Sītī (סוס סיתי *sws syty*), Knābtī (כנאבתי, *knʾbty*), and ʾIsḥāq al-Bānyān (אסחאק אלבאניאן, *ʾsḥʾq ʾlbʾnyʾn*); the first is thus identified as a Seṭṭi, a term for merchants associated with South India, the second as a citizen of Kambhāt (Cambay) in Gujarat, and the third as a Banian, or a merchant associated with North India, surprisingly bearing a typical Semitic name, Isaac (Goitein and Friedman 2010a, 151n37).[32] Seṭṭi merchants are mentioned in several inscriptions related to medieval transregional trade networks with both Nāyars and Muslims connected with West Asia (Vasanthamadhavan 1996; Hall 2010, 128, 131).

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32   ותתפצל ותכץ עני סוס סיתי וכנאבתי [[ואסחק]] ואסחאק אלבאניאן אפצל אלסלאם ותערפהם שוקי אליהם (*wttfṣl wtḵṣ ʿny sws syty wḵnʾḇty wʾsḥʾq ʾlbʾnyʾn ʾfṣl ʾlslʾm wtʿrfhm šwqy ʾlyhm*), "Kindly address on my behalf Sūs Sītī and Kanāḇtī and Isaac the Banian [with my] best wishes and inform them my longing to them". (TS 18 J 2, f. 7, verso, lines 1–3).

Kanābtī is probably an appellation derived from Kambhāt (Cambay), the famous and affluent medieval port town in Gujarat (Lamb 1958, 235; Pearson 2003, 94; Ho 2007, 352–3). Banian merchants are related to the Vaiśya, or merchant, caste, which can be traced back to ancient Indian civilization and to the Sanskrit term *vaṇij*, "merchant". The earliest known occurrences of the derived term *bānyān* are in Arabic. Banians are associated mainly with the northwestern parts of India and comprise many sub-castes. They belong either to Jain or to Vaiṣṇava religious groups (Lamb 1958, 235–6; Findly 1997, 289–91). It is therefore surprising to find the designation Banian attached to a Semitic name, a point I shall return to in the concluding section.

Names and appellations of Indian merchants, ship owners, and business associates occur in the Geniza documents time and again. However, the closeness and intimacy projected in this specific letter is uncommon. It demonstrates, I believe, the unique character of Abraham Ben Yijū's business network in India as a network crossing boundaries of caste, religion, ethnicity, and even language. Such an intricate and closely tied network must have been based on a high degree of social and spatial mobility and on free access to elite groups close to the centers of political power in the various regions along the West Coast. It is for this reason that the relations of Ben Yijū with a Nāyar defined as an in-law cannot be ruled out on the pretext of violating caste or class norms; rather, they can be viewed as a networking strategy shared by both West Asian migrant merchants and local financial and economic agents. It should not come as a surprise that Aśu's brother, Nāyar, had an interest in an alliance with Ben Yijū and his business associates in India and abroad. It would be surprising, on the other hand, if a man free to own property and to interact in a long-distance maritime trade network were the brother of a slave girl, if Aśu's designation in the deed of manumission is to be taken at its face value.

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Whose Property?

If indeed Ben Yijū's business network in India relied on matrimonial alliance with a Nāyar household, the reference in the deed of manumission to Aśu's "mistress' house" (בית גברתיך, *byt gbrtyk*) denotes, in effect, Aśu's matrilineal household, or *taṟavāṭə*, which denotes an impartible house and land unit (Moore 1985). Arguably, Aśu's *taṟavāṭu* was instrumental in establishing Ben Yijū's elaborate and intricate business hub, which consisted of a bronze workshop as well as trade in cardamom, pepper, betel nuts, and raw materials for processing bronze and other metals (Goitein and Friedman 1999, 267; 2010b, 9–10). Another clue for the matrilineal background of the partnership is found in a letter sent many years after the alliance with Aśu took place. In this letter, Ben Yijū's business associate and coreligionist Maḍmūn Ben Ḥasan urges Ben Yijū to return from the land of India to Aden with his property and children. In the letter, sent in approximately 1145, Ben Ḥasan warns Ben Yijū that he should better return to Aden, for if he dies in India, his property will be lost and his children will be among those accommodated or sheltered (תאויה, *t'wyh*) by the land (אלבלאד, *'lbl'd*).[33] What Ben Ḥasan's concern was is not very clear; was he implying that the children might lose their Jewish identity and become integrated in the local non-Jewish population? While this is possible, it seems to me more likely that the concern was about their inheritance, namely that Ben Ḥasan was concerned that the children would not be entitled to inherit their father in

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[33]   והו אצלח מן גלוסה פי בלאד אלהנד לאן אן לחקה ואלעאיד באללה אלללה אלאגל תלף גמיע מא מעה וצארת תאויה אלבלאד [מן] אולאדה מן גמלה [מן], ULC O recto 1080 J 263 lines 20–22, TS NS J 285 r. line 1 (transliterated in Goitein and Friedman 2010a, 209). "And it [=returning to Aden] is better than your stay in the land of India, because if, God Forbid, death befalls [you], your property will be lost and your children will become part of all whom the land shelters" (my translation, based on Goitein and Friedman 2010a, 211–2 and on consultation with M. A. Friedman and Sarah Stroumsa in Jerusalem, 23/06/2016. Any mistakes are my own).

the matrilineal extended household, and that they would depend for their livelihood on their mother's house, the *taṟavāṭə*, rather than on their own property.

The term *bilād* in reference to Ben Yijū's place of residence is used by Ben Ḥasan twice, once specified as India (בלאד אלהנד, *blʾd ʾl-hnd*) and once modified by the definite article *al-* (אלבלאד, *ʾl-blʾd*). In the first occurrence, the term denotes the country in its widest sense possible, whereas in the second occurrence he refers to the specific town or village in which Ben Yijū lived with his wife and children, namely Aśu's *taṟavāṭə*.[34] In other words, Ben Ḥasan is aware of the possibility that the members of Aśu's *taṟavāṭə* might claim Ben Yijū's property if he dies and, even worse, they might subject his children to becoming members of the *taṟavāṭə*, which implies the annulment of their affiliation with the Jewish family of their father. Notably, in a matrilineal system, Nāyar women need not be obliged to a single husband; the father of their children can leave without affecting the social or kinship status of his children. The conjugal relation to a husband is marked by a form of marriage called *sambandham*, which may or may not be transient. It is, therefore, likely that Ben Yijū was not even married to Aśu in the Jewish sense of marriage; *sambandham* marriage allows the women to be more or less free to cohabitate with a man of their choice for a certain period as desired by them (Gough 1961, 334–44; Moore 1988). It seems that Ben Ḥasan was aware of these customs and that he warned Ben Yijū against passing on his property to the matrilineal line of the family contrary to the interests of Ben Yijū's Jewish family back in Egypt.

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34   The term *balad* (*bilād* is the plural form) may refer in Levantine Colloquial Arabic to a country or a hometown (see http://www.livingarabic.com/dictionaries?dc=2&st=0&q=%D 8%A8%D9%84%D8%AF, accessed March 22, 2018), which is comparable with the usage of the word *nāṭə* in nowadays Malayalam. Jewish Malayalam speakers in Israel who migrated from Kerala in the 1950s still use the term *taṟavāṭə* to refer to their ancestral home and *taṟavāṭicci* to refer to the eldest female member of the house (Gamliel 2013, 145).

Taking all these considerations into account, there are still many questions left open. Perhaps the most pressing question, as raised by an anonymous reviewer of this paper, is whether upper-caste Hindus would allow a foreign trader to "pollute" their household. The same can be asked about the Jewish traders, namely, how far they would be willing to "bend" the Halakhic regulations against intermarriage with non-Jewish women. To rule out the possibility that traders from both sides of the Arabian Sea would be as liberal (or at least flexible) in such matters is at odds with evidence presented in this paper. The fierce opposition that Ben Yijū encountered in Yemen and the refusal on part of the local Jewish society to recognize his children as his lawful heirs underlines Ben Yijū's efforts in maneuvering his business and his life between two conflicting socioeconomic systems. The letter by Maḍmūn Ben Ḥasan and the documents regarding Ben Yijū's appeals to the rabbinical authorities in Yemen show that the transregional trade maneuvers depended to a large extent on kinship relations, which were often fraught with complications. The kinship-based network is one possible and common strategy in the socioeconomic management of production as well as trade (Gurukkal 2010, 307–8; Bhattacharya, Dharampal-Frick and Gommans 2007, 96–7).

Conclusion

That landowners sought alliances with West Asian traders for economic and political reasons is attested in inscriptions from the ninth, tenth and thirteenth centuries (Narayanan 1972, 23–42; Malekandathil 2007). The emergence of monotheistic communities and their continued contacts with West Asia was also due to transregional and intercommunal contacts that hardly, if at all, left traces in history. The records left of Abraham

Ben Yijū and his business network, stretching between the Mediterranean and the Malabar Coast, offer a glimpse of processes and patterns of exchange on which official records and historiographies are silent. The conjugal alliance between Ben Yijū and Aśu demonstrates the strategy of intermarriage as instrumental in building up a transregional network based on kinship alliances, notwithstanding the negative attitudes of orthodox Brahmanism and Judaism alike.[35] It is possible that during certain periods and in certain regions, Nāyars engaged or interested in overseas trade would consider foreign traders as their equals in socioeconomic status and, hence, eligible to marriage. Such a history of pragmatic and liberal intermarriage may explain the discrepancy between the slave origins and upper-class status of the majority of Cochin Jews as attested in the early sixteenth-century responsum discussed above. Additionally, certain ritual symbols—especially in relation to marriage customs—are attested to for all the Māppiḷa communities (see below), Jewish, Christian, and Muslim alike (Walerstein 1987, 92–113; Bayly 1984, 184; Miller 2015, 44, 179–181).

Thus, besides being a curious life story, the story of Aśu and Ben Yijū contributes to the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the West Coast of South India. That their respective communities evolved based on similar patterns of transregional networking is evident also in the reference to Isḥāq al-Bānyān, whose name baffled Goitein and Friedman (2010a, 151n35); how did a man bearing a Semitic name come be termed an Indian merchant? Notably, it is impossible to determine whether Isḥāq was a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim, as the Cairo Geniza letters and documents often mention people whose names do not betray their religion (Margariti 2014, 45–9). However, in the case of Isḥāq it is possible to know that while he was

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35   Though Muslims are considered the most liberal in this regard, the *mut'a* license for temporary marriage encountered legal opposition in their case as well (Friedman 1991; Dale 1990, 160–1 and 161n8).

of Semitic origin, he was also integrated into the local caste system, for otherwise his Jewish business associates would not have marked his Indian occupational affiliation, *al-bānyān*, "the merchant", normally associated with either Jains or Hindus, as mentioned above. The combination of a Semitic proper name and an Indian occupational designation attests to the fact that during Ben Yijū's time, when the letter with the reference to Isḥāq al-Bānyān was written, descendants of intermarriage between West Asian merchants and Indian traders were integrated into the transregional networks. Some other names and people mentioned in the letters seem to refer to indigenous Jews, Christians, or Muslims, like a merchant from Dharmapaṭṭaṇam (*drmtn*, דרמתן), whose name is Yosef or Yūsuf (*ywsf*, יוסף) Lanbi (*lnby*, לנבי), which might also be a combination of a Semitic name with an unidentified South Asian designation.

The origins of Jewish and Christian communities along the Malabar Coast can be safely be attributed to itinerant traders forming trade alliances with local landlords, with intermarriages being one strategy for establishing a transregional network. There could have been various pragmatic reasons for a West Asian trader to cohabitate with a local woman besides merely looking for comfort and domestic service in aligning with concubines or maid-servants. Another pragmatic reason for intermarriage was the begetting of bilingual children, possibly the most efficient way to create a network of translators so essential in conducting business across diverse regions and cultures. The children born to mixed couples carved their own caste status in the social matrix of Malabar known as Māppiḷa, a designation worthy of matrilineal and cross-cousin alliances as it is derived from the words *māmaṉ*, "maternal uncle", and *piḷḷa*, "son". It should be noted that matrilineal castes were not necessarily Nāyars; there were also castes of fisher folk, artisans, and cultivators of a lower social status (and lesser ritual purity as well) who were following matrilineal lines of descent. The

boundaries between those communities that emerged out of intermarriages with upper-caste Nāyars and those whose ancestry is traced to lower-caste communities are still retained, to a certain extent, even today (Bayly 1984, 243–251; Gough 1961, 415). Under these circumstances, interreligious relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims are shaped by their shared origins in matrilineal kinship relations utilized for establishing transregional business networks, often in collaboration with each other (Margariti 2014).

Naturally, the transregional kinship alliances proved beneficial also for the South Indian traders and landlords. The period in which Ben Yijū resided in India witnessed several historical changes in the state and social formations of the western coast of South India. This is a period in which the Old Malayalam language emerges as the administrative language of the region in inscriptions dated from the ninth to the thirteenth century (Sekhar 1951), with at least two inscriptions, from 849 and 1000, attesting to the alliances between the ruling and landowning classes and West Asian traders. Maritime trade activities witnessed by the Judeo-Arabic Geniza documents contributed, at least to a certain extent, to the socioeconomic development of the Malayalam-speaking region and to its political evolution independently of the historic Tamiḻakam in a period characterized as the early medieval period (Veluthat 2009, 3). The Coḻas to the east posed an ongoing threat to the rulers of Kerala, who became more and more dependent on chieftains and traders for supporting their political power. The alliance with Arab traders is vividly depicted in traditionally attributing the origin of Islam in Kerala to the conversion of a Kerala king in the twelfth century, supported by inscriptional evidence (Narayanan 2013, 129–34). Interestingly, one of the oldest mosques in Kerala was built in 1124 in Māṭāyi, a medieval port town in the same coastal area dotted with port towns inhabited by Ben Yijū and his relatives and frequently visited by his multiethnic business associates.

Abraham Ben Yijū settled in an area on the margins of the great empires, the Coḻas to the east and the Cāḷukyas to the north, where a decentralized political system of *nāṭuvāḻi*s, "rural chieftains", was prevalent (Veluthat 2009, 193–203). It is difficult to imagine a foreign trader like Ben Yijū spreading a network of overseas and hinterland trade without the collaboration or consent of such a *nāṭuvāḻi*. This alliance between local landowners and chieftains and Arabic-speaking traders left little traces in historical accounts of the period, and it is only much later, after the emergence of full-fledged religious communities, that evidence for Māppiḷa-Nāyar political alliances in both foreign and local accounts begins to emerge. The story of Ben Yijū and Aśu is, therefore, a rare glimpse into the period of formation of transregional networks and of transformation from kinship alliances to religious communities.

Acknowledgments

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Between Heretics and Jews: Inventing Jewish Identities in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT   The Beta Israel, the Ethiopian Jews, have suffered from a negative or complete misrepresentation in the written and oral sources of pre-modern Ethiopia. The term "Jew" was deliberately chosen to stigmatize heretic groups, or any other group deviating from the normative church doctrine. Often no difference was made between Jewish groups or heretic Christians; they were marginalized and persecuted in the harshest way. The article illustrates how Jews are featured in the Ethiopian sources, the apparent patterns in this usage, and the polemic language chosen to describe these people.

KEY WORDS   Ethiopian Jews; Ethiopian Christianity; oral traditions and legends; anti-Jewish polemics

Introduction

"His stature was comely; and his countenance was handsome. He looked like an Israelite person. His face was delightful, and his overall (demeanour) was jovial." (Getatchew Haile 2013, 166, tr.)

"As the Holy Spirit speaks through the holy prophets, so speaks the devil through the ungodly Jews, the unclean dogs." (Conti Rossini 1965, 93; my translation)

These contrasting statements—both originating in pre-modern Ethiopian texts—illustrate the ambiguous image of Jews or Israelites in Ethiopian

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culture.[1] Besides the Beta Israel, one of the groups of Jewish belief in Ethiopia, many groups and individuals are addressed as *Ayhud*, "Jew", in Ethiopian sources.[2] Despite the church's own strong Hebraic tendencies, many leading clerics and ambitious rulers sought to free the Ethiopian Church from foreign, and allegedly Jewish, elements. What exactly these elements were was, however, subjective, and polemical texts directed at the religious other abound. Political dissidents were just as often degraded and called "Jews", as were religious opponents. As many monks exerted a considerable amount of influence, and as several rebel-monks are known to have challenged the Ethiopian rulers, we observe a "congruence between religious and political connotations of the word" (Kaufman Shelemay 1989, 22).

Little is known about the literary sources of Christian Ethiopia outside the field of Ethiopian Studies, and even less about the representation of Jews therein. The following article seeks to present an overview of repeating motifs found in Christian sources up to the sixteenth century, and of how Jewish identities were fashioned.

For readers not familiar with Ethiopia, I will provide a very short introduction to the country and its history. It will be followed by a list of terms used to address members of religious groups in Ethiopia, and examples of how these terms are featured in the sources.

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1   Ethiopia, in the historic sense, comprises the highlands, which spread across Ethiopia and Eritrea today, and parts of the Eritrean shore. The ancient capital was Aksum, ruling over the homonymous kingdom of Aksum, which spread around it. In later centuries, power shifted southwards to the regions of Lasta, Semien, Gondär, and the area around Lake Tana. In the Middle Ages, Gondär was the royal capital for many centuries.

2   The correct spelling of their name would be Betä Ǝsraʾel, but for the sake of simplicity, I will use the above form in this article. Other groups, such as the Betä Abraham or the Qəmant, shall not be part of this investigation.

A word must be said on the matter of sources—besides written sources—which exist (in large numbers) only from the fourteenth century onward; oral history is an integral part when reconstructing the history of Ethiopia. Especially for a group like the Beta Israel, who have not written down their own history, it becomes essential to work with the stories and legends preserved in the collective memory, as stressed by Abbink: "we cannot also but emphasize the role of historical myths as *charters*" (1990, 400). Since the 1980s, the beginning of the Aliyah of the Beta Israel,[3] this memory is dying out and fading away. Therefore, studies which have collected Beta Israel oral traditions before this date are of great value and function as a legitimate historical source to study the group's history.[4] However, there are legends and myths in Ethiopia which are so commonly known that it is impossible to pinpoint their origin or source; they are simply part of the intangible heritage of the country.

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3   Especially the two mass evacuations of Beta Israel from Ethiopia are known: "Operation Moses" in 1984 and "Operation Solomon" in 1991.

4   There are narratives, such as the so called *Kǝbrä Nägäśt* (see below), which are so widespread that they have a canonical appeal to them; however, there are many legends and stories collected by individuals which are less canonical but no less important. We owe great thanks to a number of scholars who have collected Ethiopian oral tradition and preserved them for the future, among them early travellers and missionaries (Bruce, D'Abbadie, Gobat, Stern) and later scholars (Abbink, Kaufman Shelemay, Kaplan, Leslau, Quirin). Especially valuable are the works of Sergew Hable Sellasie and Tadesse Tamrat, who both collected many local traditions, unearthed rare manuscripts, and made their findings accessible to the world.

The *Kəbrä Nägäśt*

Much of Ethiopian self-perception is centred around a historic novel called the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (*Glory of the Kings*).[5] The most important part of the text elaborates a story found in the biblical books 1 Kings 10:1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9. According to this national epic of Christian Ethiopia, Judaism reached Ethiopia during the time of King Solomon. The legend holds that the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba, called the Queen of Ethiopia or Makədda in this text, travelled to Jerusalem to visit King Solomon to test his wisdom. Not only did he convert her to his faith, but he also fathered a son with her, who was born while she was returning to Ethiopia. This son, by the name of Mənilək (called Bayna Ləhkəm[6] in the text), ventures out to meet his father in person and travels to Jerusalem, too. He is welcomed by his father and, upon his departure, is given many valuable presents. Solomon moreover decides to send the first-born sons of the city's nobility to Ethiopia along with Mənilək. These youths, depressed by having to leave their home, decide to steal the Ark of the Covenant and take it to Ethiopia (Bezold 1905). When they arrived in Aksum, the Queen abdicated in Mənilək's favour and

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5   The original text was probably composed in Coptic. However, while drawing on a large number of sources, including, besides O.T. and N.T., rabbinical and midrashic lore, texts such as *Pirqe Rabbi ʾEliʿezer,* apocryphal texts such as *Book of Enoch, Book of Jubilees, Cave of Treasures, Apocalypse of Peter, Gosple of Nicodemus,* and many more (see Hubbard 1956 for an extensive analysis of the sources). According to the colophon of the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* text, the novel was translated (and possibly re-shaped) from Arabic into Gəʿəz by the leading ecclesiastic dignitary of Aksum, *nəbura ʾəd* Yəshaq, most probably between 1324 and 1321–22 (Conti Rossini 1923–25, 506–508). The text underwent a long and complex process of editing and rewriting, but presumably reached its final text edition in the second half of the fifteenth century, a date based on the oldest known manuscript, Paris, Bibliotheque National de France, Éth. 5 (also known as 94) as proposed by Piovanelli (2014b, 689).

6   From the Arabic Ibn al-Ḥākim, 'Son of the Wise Man' (i.e. Solomon), the name Mənilək established itself in the general Ethiopian literature.

announced that no woman would ever rule the country again.[7] To this day, the Ark is said to lie in the ancient city of Aksum in northern Ethiopia. One priest guards the Ark and is the only one allowed to enter the little chapel.

Let us leave the world of legends[8] for what scholars accept as factual. Christianity reached Ethiopia through two Syrian-born Christians by the names Aedesius and Frumentius in the fourth century. They both became influential in raising the young Ethiopian King Ezana and later converted him to Christianity. Frumentius finally travelled to Egypt and was ordained the first Bishop of Ethiopia. Roughly by the 340s AD, the royal court and parts of the population had embraced Christianity (Munro-Hay 2003).

The cities of Aksum and Adulis were in direct contact with the Mediterranean, and were trade hubs for the entire Red Sea area. It must be expected that the cities were home to adherents of all kinds of religions (among them Jews), but evidence is scarce and it is assumed that their numbers were fairly small.[9]

By the sixth century, the strength of the Ethiopian Kingdom as well as its Christian faith was widely known even in Rome, and the Ethiopian King Kaleb was fighting as an ally of the Byzantine Emperor Justin I against the Jewish King of Ḥimyar, Yusuf Asʾar Yathʾar.[10] Upon his return, Kaleb is said to have brought a considerable number of Jewish prisoners back to Aksum (Kaplan 1992,

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7   This is a very curious statement which seems out of context in the story. However, the circle closes later in the legends when Aksum is destroyed by an "evil" Queen, as will be seen below.

8   In fact, for certain periods sources are so scarce or non-existent that a certain amount of legendary material will always be included in the analysis conducted in this article.

9   For example, a funerary inscription for a Greek boy was found, indicating that entire families of traders from foreign regions had settled in the area (Fiaccadori 2007a).

10   Yusuf Asʾar Yathʾar was responsible for massacring the Christian population of Najran, which was the trigger for the military action taken up by Justin and Kaleb (Fiaccadori 2007b).

32). Kaleb later abdicated from his rule and led the religious life of a monk.[11] The sources do not allow a clear image of Kaleb's succession (Brakmann 1994, 110). Apparently, Kaleb had appointed his son Betä Ǝsra'el[12] to rule over the newly subjected regions in Ḥimyar[13] and his other son Gäbrä Mäsqäl to rule Aksum. Following the Imperial Aksumite practice, the rule would have gone to Kaleb's first-born son, Betä Ǝsra'el; however, it seems that Gäbrä Mäsqäl inherited the throne. According to the *Kǝbrä Nägäśt,* his two sons Gäbrä Mäsqäl and Betä Ǝsra'el met on the "Southern Sea"[14] and fought against each other, with Gäbrä Mäsqäl emerging victorious:

> And God will say to Gabra Maskal, "Choose thou between the chariot and Zion", and He will cause him to take Zion, and he [Gäbrä Mäsqäl] shall reign openly upon the throne of his father. And God will make Israel to choose the chariot, and he shall reign secretly and he shall not be visible, and He

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11   This episode is mentioned in many hagiographies of the "Nine Saints" and in the *Martyrdom of Arethas* (s. Bausi and Gori 2006, 103–110, and §39; Brita 2010, 48, 173), but featured most prominently in the reading in the Synaxary for Ṭǝqǝmt 6 dedicated to the memory of Abba Ṗänṭälewon, one of the famous "Nine Saints". It includes the story of how Kaleb went to the Saint to ask him for his spiritual support in the fight against the Ḥimyarite Jews (here called the "country of Saba" with the "King of Judah"). After Kaleb's victorious return, he took up monastic vows with Ṗänṭälewon (Colin 1987, 24–25; Brita 2010, 152–153). These texts also include a reference that Kaleb handed over his kingdom to his son Gäbrä Mäsqäl without including any hint to Betä Ǝsra'el (see the following section).

12   For the person Betä Ǝsra'el, the correct transcription is chosen.

13   The *Kǝbrä Nägäśt* calls him "king of Nagran" (ንጉሥ፡ ናግራን), Bezold 1905, 171, text; 137, tr.

14   This is explained as the sea gate Bab el-Mandab (Gate of Tears) between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula (Bezold 1905, 137, Piovanelli 2014b, 696). Should Betä Ǝsra'el really have governed over Ḥimyar, he and Gäbrä Mäsqäl would indeed have met halfway.

will send him to all those who have transgressed the commandment of God. (Budge 1932, 227)[15]

While Gäbrä Mäsqäl became an icon for the spreading of Christianity,[16] little is known about his brother.[17] The traditional story interprets the names of the brothers, Gäbrä Mäsqäl "Servant of the Cross" versus Betä Ǝsraʾel "House of Israel", to indicate that the latter remained an adherent to the old religion (Getatchew Haile 1982a, 320). A legend has it that when Gäbrä Mäsqäl triumphed over Betä Ǝsraʾel and his followers, they took refuge far away from Aksum in the remote highlands of the Semien mountains, an area which later became part of the heartland of the Beta Israel as a group (Getatchew Haile 1982a, 320). This could be an elaboration of the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* lines "he shall reign secretly and he shall not be visible, and He will send him to all those who have transgressed the commandment of God".[18]

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15   Cf. ወይቤሎ ፡ ለገብረ፡ መስቀል፡ ጎረይ፡ ለከ፡ እምሰረገላ፡ ወእምጽዮን፡ ወአፍተዋ ፡ ከመ፡ ይንሣእ፡ ጽዮንሃ፡ ወይነግሥ፡ ገሀደ፡ ዲበ፡ መንበረ፡ አቡሁ፤ ወለእስራኤልኒ፡ አፍተዋ፡ ከመ፡ ይነግሥ፡ ስረገላ፡ ወይነግሥ፡ በጎቡር፡ ወኢይትረአይ፡ ወይፌንዎ፡ ጎበ፡ ኵሎሙ፡ እለ፡ ተዐደዉ፡ ትእዛዘ፡ እግዚአብሔር፤ (Bezold 1905, 171, text; 137, tr.); see also Piovanelli 2014b, 696)

16   Contemporary sources from his time are scarce, but Gäbrä Mäsqäl is featured in several hagiographies of the Nine Saints; he takes a special place in the hagiography of Abba Garima (s. Brita 2010). He is said to have encouraged the work of St. Yared, the inventor of the Ethiopian Ecclesiastical music (Conti Rossini 1904, 11f., text and translation), to have donated land to various monasteries (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1971, 162), and to have been buried at one of the most prominent monasteries of Ethiopia, Däbrä Dammo – even though there is a large underground stone grave in Aksum which is said to be the tomb of Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl (cf. Conti Rossini 1909–10, 6, text; 5 translation; Munro-Hay 2005).

17   Or even his two brothers, as the information found in inscriptions and coins indicate that Kaleb had three sons, Betä Ǝsraʾel (in various spellings), Gäbrä Mäsqäl, and Gäbrä Krəstos—his existence is, however, the most disputed (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 159, 161). The only reliable information on Betä Ǝsraʾel lets us pinpoint his rule to a time at least fifty years after Kaleb's abdication (Piovanelli 2014b, 698).

18   There are chronicles which continue this point of Betä Ǝsraʾel ruling over the invisible world and state that he became the leader of the Zār possession cult (Sergew Hable

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The form of Christianity prevalent in Ethiopia from its beginnings to recent times is moulded by strong biblical-Hebraic influences, sometimes also called Jewish influences (Kaplan 1992, 17–20).[19] It is, however, wrong to see this as a direct influence of Jews on Ethiopian Christianity; rather, it must be understood as a combination of the interpretation of the Bible, the prevalence of certain scriptures, such as the Books of Enoch and Jubilees, and local customs often interpreted to be of Jewish origin.[20] The exact understanding of rules, especially from the Old Testament, was not undisputed in Ethiopia. Christological disputes are known to have troubled Ethiopian Christians for centuries. One might count the rivalry of Gäbrä Mäsqäl and his brother Betä Ǝsraʾel as the first great schism of Ethiopia, although not enough sources exist to validate this claim. The interpretation of rules changed centuries later under the influential rulers such as Amdä Ṣǝyon I or Zärʾa Yaʿǝqob. Recurring topics of doctrinal debates were the observance of the Saturday Sabbath and the veneration of Mary, over which deadly disputes erupted.[21] From Amdä Ṣǝyon's time onwards, in the

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Sellasie 1972a, 160). Since the first reliable references to the Zār-cult originate only in the sixteenth century, the aforementioned chronicles must be of a far more recent date than the sixth to seventh centuries (Rodinson 1964a, 239).

19   Edward Ullendorff was probably the most prominent scholar to support the idea that Ethiopian Christianity was "impregnated with strong Hebraic and archaic Semitic elements" (1956, 216). In contrast, August Dillmann and Maxime Rodinson underlined that the presence of Hebraic elements in the Ethiopian Church originated not through direct contact with Jews, but through imitation of the Old Testament, and that these elements were especially promulgated in the fifteenth century under Zärʾa Yaʿǝqob. Rodinson further demonstrates that the association of Ethiopian Christianity with Jewish-Hebrew influences only arose with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries to Ethiopia in the sixteenth century (1964b, 11).

20   One example is the circumcision of boys, which is not only prevalent in other Christian Churches (Coptic), but found in African cultures more generally; other examples include dietary and purity laws (Rodinson 1964b, 14).

21   The term Saturday Sabbath as opposed to Sunday Sabbath is explained below. These doctrinal disputes were such a frequent topic in the history of the Ethiopian Church that

fourteenth century, enough written sources were passed down which now allow us to analyse the description of Jews in Ethiopia.

The Beta Israel and the *Kəbrä Nägäśt*

It is important to briefly explain how the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* was accepted among the Beta Israel themselves. The last chapters of the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (95–117) described Jews in a very hostile way as "vanquished people, degraded and eternally subjected" (Abbink 1990, 410). Nevertheless, Beta Israel history understands its people to possibly have originated in the *Kəbrä Nägäśt*, because, just like the Solomonic dynasty, "by associating themselves with the Solomon-Sheba legend the Beta Israel were claiming to be part of Ethiopia's cultural elite" (Kaplan 1993, 652).

Some oral traditions have formed which added additional information to the *Kəbrä Nägäśt*, even forming two different streams of legend. The first claims that the group of first-born sons from Jerusalem's elite, responsible for stealing the Ark, were the ancestors of the Beta Israel. It is through them that the group inherited its Jewish faith, customs, and literature.[22]

In the second oral legend elaborating on the *Kəbrä Nägäśt*, besides the group of firstborn sons, a group of artisans also accompanied Mənilək back to Ethiopia. They later formed the Beta Israel, who, due to the inflicted landlessness, specialized in handicrafts (Krempel 1973, 24). It is true that

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Getatchew Haile writes: "There is in fact not a single new heresy in the writings of Zär'a Ya'əqob known to me that has not been mentioned before his time" (1981, 102). See, for example, a number of hymns concerning the Sabbath questions in Getatchew Haile (1983a, 38–39).

22   Probably the first European to collect this oral tradition was James Bruce (1791, 122; Stern 1862, 184–185).

there was a moment in time when Beta Israel were sought-after artisans and helped construct the royal castles of Gondär (Pankhurst 1995, 81), yet this legend can be seen as pejorative, as it was used by the Christians to manifest the landless state of the Beta Israel (Krempel 1973, 26–27). Despite the short period in which the Beta Israel were allowed to work as free artisans, they were limited to despised tasks for centuries, such as weaving, pottery, and smithing (Quirin 1992, 40–88; Kaplan 1993, 647; Pankhurst 1995, 92).

Introducing the Terms

Ethiopian sources use a plethora of terms to refer to the religious other, the heretic, the Jew or Muslim. It becomes obvious that Jews often appear in the sources in a negative way. They are featured amongst idolaters, magicians and sorcerers, heretic Christians, Muslims, and pagans. The texts are typically of a highly polemical nature, intentionally using negative terminology to create an image of religious opponents, often using the reference to Jews as a way to discredit the opposing group. Only in rare cases are the actual Jewish groups addressed, more often than not fictitious facts are employed to create an imagined identity. The references are not limited to religious arguments, as will be seen below; certain physical traits are also connected to persons of allegedly "Israelite" background.

There are no direct rules as to which word designates which religious identity (adherent of which belief), but when comparing a large number of sources, patterns become obvious, as will be seen in the following presentation of terms.

– Hebrews/*(H)əbraist/(H)əbrawiyan* (ዕብራይስጥ/ዕብራውያን): The term has a positive Biblical connotation, it is used in the sense of Hebrew origin or

Hebrew language and usually found in Scriptures[23] rather than indigenous Ethiopian sources

– Israelites/ᵻsraʾelawiyan[24] (እስራኤላዊያን): In the understanding of Christians, this term does not designate the Beta Israel, but rather refers to those of Solomonic descent. The positive aspects of this term are not only religious or hypothetical, but are also perceived in relation to physical form; we find in the Acts of Abuna Yoḥannes from Däbrä Zämmädo a description of his good looks: "His stature was comely; and his countenance was handsome. He looked like an Israelite person. His face was delightful, and his overall (demeanour) was jovial."[25]

– Jew/Ayhud (አይሁድ): Simply the word for "Jews", as in the Hebrew *Yehudim*, but in medieval Ethiopia, it turns into an insult and designates everybody that is viewed somehow heretical. It is often rather used in a political or polemic rhetoric instead of indicating the clear affiliation of an individual to Jewish faith.[26] In general, no group would refer to itself by the name *Ayhud* because of the clearly negative connotation (Kaplan 1993, 653). The Beta Israel never referred to themselves as Jews prior to contact with Jewish missionaries in the nineteenth century (Abbink 1990, 403; Kaplan 1992, 10).

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23   Most prominently the Epistle to the Hebrews (Ethiopic title: መልእክተ፡ ኀበ፡ ሰብአ፡ ዕብራውያን፡, *Mäläktä habä säbʾə ᵻbrawəyan*, published in Platt 1830, no page numbers).

24   Also in the plural ᵻsraʾeločč.

25   ወከመዝ፡ ውእቱ፡ ሥርዓቱ፡ አዳም፡ ቆሙ፡ ወሥናይ፡ ራእዩ፡ ወይመስል፡ እስራኤላዊ፡ ብእሴ፡ ወገጹ፡ ላህይ፡ ወፈሥሐ፡ ኮለንታሁ፡ (Getatchew Haile 2013, 37, text; 166, tr.). An affirmation of the connection between the leading Solomonic Dynasty and their "Israelite" descent is found in the *Vita* of Saint ᵻsṭifanos. When he is summoned to court to explain why he refused to bow before Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, he answers that the king should be honoured for being a Christian, not for being Israelite. (s. Annex 1).

26   Emperor Zärʾa Yaʿəqob often insults Jews in his works, without a reference to a specific Jewish person: ወይእዜኒ፡ ስምዑ፡ ኵልክሙ፡ ማኅበረ፡ አይሁድ፡ ስቃልያነ፡ ወልደ፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ ሕያው፡ … ለምንትኬ፡ ተጎይጥዎሙ፡ ለሕዝበ፡ ክርስቲያን፡, "Now listen, all you Jews, you who have crucified the son of the living God … why do you want to tempt the Christian people?" (Wendt 1962, 6, text and tr.).

Thus, when a chronicle claims that "some parts of the chronicle are old, and to some extent authentic" (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 114), and at the same time states that Queen Judith[27] proclaimed: "I am a Jewess and my husband also is a Jew,"[28] it is most probably a modern interpolation.

– *Arami* (አራሚ): A word for "pagan, non-Christian, infidel".[29] The term is mostly used for non-Christian Oromo,[30] and especially for Muslims—just as the term *Ayhud* became a clear denomination for Christian heretics and Jews, *Arami* is interchangeable with Muslim.[31] A non-pejorative term for Muslim would be *Tənbalat* (also *Tənbalatawi*, ትንባላት and ትንባላታዊ; Solomon Gebreyes 2016, 37). There are cases where the word *Arami* refers to Greeks, as well.[32]

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27   A legendary "evil Queen", see below.

28   እስመ፡ አነ፡ ኮንኩ፡ አይሁዳዊት፡ ወብእሲየኒል አይሁዳዊ፡ ውእቱ፡ (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 114).

29   Most probably referring to heretic Christians or Jews are these lines: ወዘኒ፡ ዘይቤ፡ በእንተ፡ አብኦ፡ አረሚ፡ በልዎ፡ ኃድግ፡ አረሚ፡ እለኒ፡ ይብሉ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ በአፉሆሙኣ፡ ወእሙ፡ ኢሐሩ፡ በአሰረ፡ ሕጉ፡ ኢናስተሳትፎሙ፡ ውስተ፡ ምሥዋዒነአ፡, "As to what he has said about bringing *arämi* (into church), tell him, let alone the *arämi*, even those who say (they are) Christian with their mouth, we will not let to take part in our sacrifice…" (Getatchew Haile 2006, 62, text; 53, tr.).

30   The largest ethnic group in Ethiopia traditionally followed their own religion and later often converted to Christianity and Islam. They migrated in large numbers to the Christian highlands of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century and are often mentioned by Christian sources in a derogatory way (Gebissa 2010).

31   Equalling *Arami* (here *Aramawəyan*) with Muslims, and moreover giving a historic reference to the Muslim conquest of Ethiopia, is the prophecy of *Abuna* Yoḥannəs of Däbrä Zämmädo: እስመ፡ ይመጽኡ፡ አረማውያን፡ ወያጠፍኡ፡ ኩሎ፡ ክርስቲያነ፡ ወያመዘብሩ፡ ኩሎ፡ አብያተ፡ ክርስቲያናተ፡, "The Arämis will come and destroy all the Christians and lay all the churches waste" (Getatchew Haile 2013, 69, text; 207, tr.). A *Sälam*-hymn to two Saints who died while proselytizing among Muslims reads: በቅድመ፡ አረሚ፡ ርኩስ፡ ሶባ፡ ስመ፡ ክርስቶስ አግሐዱ፡, "When they revealed the name of Christ before the unclean *Arämi*" (Getatchew Haile 1983a, 23, a similar reference also on page 24).

32   This is mostly true for translation of Biblical books, such as John 7,35: ውስተ፡ ብሔረ፡ አረሚኑ፡ የሐውር፡ እንሃ፡ ወይሜህሮሙ፡ ለአረሙ፡, "Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?" (s. Dillmann 1865, 730 for list of references).

– *ꟻləw* (ዕልዉ):[33] The term indicates infidels and heretics, but the tendency is again to designate pagans and Muslims, not Jews and Christian heretics.[34] Its clear negative connotation becomes obvious when considering the other translations of the term: "crooked, perverse, evil, perfidious, iniquitous, disobedient, rebellious, rebel, apostate, heretic, heretical, copy" (Leslau 1987, 62). It is also found in the statement that Queen Judith was from the "tribe of heretics" (እምነገደ፡ ዕልዋን፡, Perruchon 1893, 370).

Combining the three terms *Ayhud*, *Arami* and *ꟻləw* and clearly distinguishing them from one another is demonstrated in this sentence from the *Senodos* (a canonical-liturgical book on church law):[35] "If there is one who is nominated for the office of a priest, who out of the fear of man, of Jews, of infidels and heretics denounces the name of Christ, he shall be expelled."[36]

Besides terms composed of a single word, we also find nominal compounds in reference to Jews. We encounter rather specific descriptive terms like "Jews the Crucifiers [of Christ]" (አይሁድ፡ ሰቃልያን፡),[37] "Jews the

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33   Plural: ዕልዋን (*ꟻlwan*).

34   ሰላም፡ እብል፡ ለዐምደ፡ ጽዮን፡ መናጼ፡ ዕልዋን፡, "Hail, I say to ʿAmdä Ṣǝyon destroyer of ʿǝläwan (=Muslims/revolters)," (emphasis in the original, Getatchew Haile 1983a, 43). In a similar matter, also this line: በብጽሐተ፡ መስቀል፡ መምዑ፡ ዘዕልዋን፡ አንገድ፡, "The infidel tribes [Muslims] were terrified by the arrival of the Cross" (insertion in the original, *ibid.*, 48).

35   One must admit, however, that most of the *Senondos* was composed in pre-Islamic times, probably already in the fourth century (cf. Bausi 2006); thus the terms cannot stand for Muslim. The text of the *Senodos* contains further similar references to Jews, heretics, and infidels.

36   አሐዱ፡ እምሥዮማን፡ ለእመ፡ ክሕደ፡ በእንተ፡ ፍርሀተ፡ ሰብእ፡ አው፡ እምአይሁድ፡ አው፡ እምአረሚ፡ ወዕልዋን፡ ለእመ፡ ኮነ፡ ውእቱ፡ ስመ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ [...] ይሰደድ፡ (Bausi 1995, 135, text; all translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned).

37   This is a frequent phrase, as an example see Wendt 1962, 6, 59. Or in a variant: ከመ፡ አይሁድ፡ እለ፡ ሰቅልዎ፡ ለእግዚእነ፡, "like the Jews which crucified our Lord" (Conti Rossini 1965, 76).

murderers [of our Lord]" (አይሁድ፡ ቀታልያን፡, Bausi 1995, 105, text), and "Enemies of Christ" (ጸሩ፡ ለክርስቶስ፡, Getatchew Haile 1991, 16, text).[38]

– *Käḥadi* (ከሓዲ): The term can be translated as "infidel, ungodly or faithless", and is often used as an epithet for Jews, Muslims, heretics, and pagans, "all who have not converted to the true faith of Christ" (Dillmann 1865, 825, my translation). Often the word is added to emphasize the negative aspect of a certain group. Especially in the writings of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, the words "Jew" and "ungodly" go hand in hand.[39] In contrast to many of the other terms mentioned, it is not immediately clear if it addresses one group in particular; often the term is used as ሕዝበ፡ ከሓድያን፡, "people of infidels" (Solomon Gebreyes 2016, 142, text and 216, translation).

– Falasha/*Fälasi* (ፈላሲ): The exact origin of the word or when it was used for the first time to designate the Beta Israel is not known with certainty. The translation of the word can be "landless person, an exile, stranger, monk, or ascetic". A decree of unclear date, but allegedly issued by the fifteenth-century King Yəsḥaq, states: "He who is baptized in the Christian religion may inherit the land of his father, otherwise let him be a *Fälasi*" (Taddesse Tamrat 1972, 201).[40] By the sixteenth century, the word was used to designate the Beta Israel in Gəʿəz (Old Ethiopic), Arabic, and Hebrew

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38   In a similar manner: አውጽዎ፡ እምማእከልክሙ፡ [...] ጸረ፡ ወልድየ፡ ወስቅልዎ፡ ዮም፡ በዛቲ፡ ዕለት፡ እስመ፡ ኢኮነ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ, "Take away from your midst [...] the enemy of my son, and hang him today, this very day, because he is not a Christian" (text and translation in Getatchew Haile 1986, 196).

39   በከመ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ይትናገር፡ በላዕለ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ ነቢያት፡ ከማሁ፡ ይትናገር፡ ሰይጣን፡ በላዕለ፡ አይሁድ፡ ከንድያን፡ ርኩሳን፡ ከለባት፡, "As the Holy Spirit speaks through the holy prophets, so speaks the devil through the ungodly Jews, the unclean dogs" (text in Conti Rossini 1965, 93; my translation). On the same page: አይሁድሰ፡ ከሓድያን፡ መረራን፡ እሙንቱ፡, "The Jews are ungodly and evildoers".

40   Tadesse Tamrat refers here to an Ethiopian paper manuscript which includes this passage. Quirin (1992, 12, 217) adds that this chronicle was most probably composed much later than the events it recorded. Quirin (218) also suggests that the manuscript was digitized as EMML no. 7334 (fol. 28b). Kaplan (1992, 183) adds that there is a marginal note in the

sources (Kaplan 1985, 279; Quirin 1992, 12, 217). The term, especially in its later form *Fälaša/Falasha,* is derogatory and rarely used by the Beta Israel themselves (Kaplan 2003).

What becomes obvious is the contrasting differentiation in the Christian sources between pagans and Muslims, on the one hand, and Christians and Jews, on the other. The mutual heritage of the latter is clearly understood, whereas the Abrahamic origin of Islam is not considered. One should be very careful in reading the sources and understanding that there is an actual difference between Beta Israel (as a real group of Ethiopia) and Jews (as characters in literary sources).

Jews Featuring in Hagiographies

Hagiographic literature is very popular among Ethiopian Christians.[41] The first collections of Saints' *Vitae* were translated as early as Aksumite times.[42] In the fourteenth century, many more hagiographies enriched Ethiopian literature. The core was translated from Christian Arabic *Vorlagen*, but the texts themselves can be traced to the broader Mediterranean Christian world.[43] In this same period, many hagiographies of local saints and holy

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manuscript stating, "Since then, the Beta Israel have been called *Falasoch*", but indicates the problematic state of this source.

41   The Beta Israel literary corpus also contains hagiographies (texts such as the *Testaments of Isaac, Jacob,* and *Abraham* could be considered hagiographies, as well as the narrative about Abba Sabra, which exists only in oral form), which are, however, not relevant for the present discussion.

42   It is usually assumed that the *Vita* of St. Anthony, the founder of monasticism, was translated from Greek into Gəʿəz in Aksumite times (Brakmann 1994, 167; Meinardus and Kaplan 2003).

43   The story of *Barlaam and Josaphat* can be traced back as far as to Gautama Buddha (Cerulli 1964). See Kaplan's extensive monograph *The Monastic Holy Man* (1984) on the

men and women were composed in Ethiopia itself, or, alternately, foreign stories were enhanced and adapted.[44]

The most prominent example is the *Miracles of Mary (Täʾammərä Maryam)*, which originated in twelfth-century France and gained rapid popularity.[45] In the fourteenth century, it was translated into Gəʿəz (Old Ethiopic), most probably under the auspices of Emperor Dawit II. Under his son, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, the *Miracles of Mary* were ennobled to liturgical status, when he decreed that three miracles should be read during the Sunday liturgy. Also under his patronage, many new miracles were composed and added to the corpus, the Emperor even featuring in some of them.[46] Being so popular, *Miracles of Mary* manuscripts are found in nearly every church or monastery in Ethiopia; they can contain anything from a few to several hundred miracles. A full set should contain 366 miracles, one for every day of the year, plus an extra miracle for leap years (Budge 1923, xxviii; Colin

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spread of hagiographies in Ethiopia.

44   See Brakmann's (1994) book on the Christianization of Aksum for the early stages of hagiographic literature, and Kaplan's (1984) and Taddesse Tamrat's (1972) studies for the medieval period, and Heyer (1998) as general overview.

45   "The origin of the nucleus of the legends of the Virgin lies in France. In the beginning of the twelfth century—from 1128–29 AD—a serious epidemic raged in France and vast areas were devastated and depopulated. On pilgrim sites which were consecrated to her name, legends about the aid of the Virgin sprang up and became very popular. They were soon spread all over Europe and due to the narrative and entertaining character of these stories poets and minstrels felt encouraged to compose new ones according to what they had heard and the environment where they lived. The tales were rendered into the languages and idioms of the respective countries and therefore it happened that by the route of the Crusaders, the stories eventually reached Palestine. And from the Holy Land it was then just a short way to Egypt, where the Arabic version which later was taken as the *Vorlage* for the Gəʿəz text, was produced" (Six 1999, 54).

46   His father Dawit and later monarchs are also featured in a few stories, which turns mere hagiographic material into valuable historic sources (Cerulli 1943, 79–93 on King Dawit, 94–125 on the cycle of Miracles connected to Zärʾa Yaʿəqob; Getatchew Haile 1992, especially 149–203; Perruchon 1893, 75–76).

2002, 17).[47] Today around 640 different narratives are known to exist.[48] *Miracles of Mary* are read in the daily liturgy, in the Sunday service, and on the 32 Marian feasts each year (Six 1999, 53; Fritsch 2001, 62–64).

The veneration of Mary has the highest importance in Ethiopia even today: "Ethiopian imagination … takes for granted that fiction may turn into reality, because it is established in the *Täʾammərä Maryam*" (Six 1999, 59). Most probably, this tradition originated from Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's personal preferences.[49] He was the Emperor who contributed the most to theological discussions, and was a zealous fighter for the cause he deemed correct. The three topics most central to his agenda all affected the image of Jews, as will be seen below: the veneration of Sabbath, the veneration of Mary, and his attempt to purify the Christian faith from all "evil" influences.

In addition to their function to provide religious teachings, these narratives tend to have an entertaining character, which probably adds to their popularity. Mary saves the souls of all kinds of savages, a cannibal eating his wife and children (Budge 1923, 94–97), thieves and murderers, an "evil-living Persian Knight" (Budge 1923, 138–140), adulterers, a drunken monk (Budge 1923, 135–137, 172–176), as well as a few Jews and Muslims (Budge 1923, 287–289).[50] Despite the huge variety of venerated saints, there are certain *topoi* which reoccur frequently; among them is the

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47   The Ethiopian calendar follows the old Alexandrian calendar, dividing the year into 12 months of 30 days and an additional month with five days (six in leap years).

48   Budge translated 110 Miracles in 1923, Colin published 213 in 2004, see also Cerulli (1943), and see the bibliography in Balicka-Witakowska and Bausi 2010). As presented by Veronika Six (2005, 275), the absolute number of Miracles can hardly be established; in fact, some editors or translators took the freedom to divide some Miracles into two, thus raising the number of existing Miracles. In addition, a couple of Miracles were created in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and are of no use for historical analysis.

49   The legend holds that he was only born after his mother prayed to the Virgin Mary (Getatchew Haile 1992, 1).

50   That Mary "saves" this Muslim obviously indicates that he converts to Christianity.

conversion of Jews to the "true faith", often also through the intercession of Mary.

We read about a Marian icon which "sees" "one who gobbles Jewish meat" and starts to cry (Getatchew Haile 1986, 195). When asked what the reason was, the icon starts to speak and denounces this man as an enemy of herself and her son Jesus, as one who is not a Christian.[51] The Miracle actually describes the faith of one of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's opponents, but it also provides information about dietary rules that prevailed in Ethiopia. Christians, Muslims, and Jews each have their own rule for slaughtering animals and are all usually restricted from eating of the other group's meat (Salamon 1999, 100–103).[52]

It is unfortunate for scholarly interests that only a very small number out of the many Marian Miracles have been edited;[53] the number of text translations is higher, but lack the support of the original text. The following stories are therefore only presented in translation to give an idea of the general way in which Jews feature in Marian Miracles.

A popular story, found in a few slight variations, recounts how a young Jew from Tyre accompanies a few Christian friends to church and offers praise to Mary. When his father hears about his son's behaviour, he throws the young man into a fiery furnace to burn him. Thanks to the intervention of Mary he is unharmed, and his father is scorched instead. The rest of the family becomes Christian and lives happily ever after (Budge 1923, 156–158).[54]

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51   Unfortunately, Getatchew Haile (1986, 195–196) does not provide the Gəʿəz text here.

52   In times of great famine, this rule is of course ignored (Kaplan 1992, 149).

53   An Ethiopian print of the Gəʿəz and Amharic text by Täsfa Gäbrä Səllase exist but are difficult to obtain, and moreover are not critically edited, cf. Six 199, 55, and *Ead*. 2005, 275.

54   The Gəʿəz text of this Miracle has not been published.

In a variant of this story, a young Jew is herding cattle with Christian friends. When he wants to sit down with them to share their meal, they deny it to him unless he gets baptized. The Jew agrees and the others sprinkle water over him in Baptism, and the young man accepts his new faith. When he returns home, "one saw a great light on him, and smelled an aroma that was more pleasant than that of any other scent, and it was sweeter than the smell of wine or unguent; and he sat down and the people became drunk through the smell of his perfume" (Budge 1923, 217). The story continues as in the other version, with the boy being thrown into a furnace from which he escapes unharmed due to Mary's intervention, and with the conversion of the rest of the family.

Not all miracles have such a positive touch to them, as they tend to be more brutal in showing how "evil" Jews can be and in teaching a lesson to anybody who "defiles" the Christian faith, as in the following story: A Jew and a Christian in Constantinople were great friends, but the Jew hated the Christian faith from the bottom of his heart. One day he accompanied his friend to church, where he caught sight of an icon of the Virgin Mary, which appeared in all beauty and splendour in his eyes. He inquired with his Christian friend who this woman was. When he learned that it was Mary, he became furious and went on a rampage in the church. He snatched the icon and threw it into a latrine. Immediately a devil appeared, tore out the Jew's tongue, and rushed him away into hell. The Christian was terrified by this act and went into the latrine to retrieve the icon. He cleaned and washed it, scented it and put it in a new place. Suddenly pure oil started to run out of the icon and everybody who anointed himself with it was instantly healed from every sickness whatsoever (Budge 1923, 241–242).

The genre of Miracles stories is prone to strong anti-Jewish polemics;[55] Jews are often used as a manner of showing and warning against the "wrong" lifestyle.[56] Not all Miracle story-cycles are as detailed as the Marian Miracles, however. The *Miracles of Jesus* (*Täʾammər*ä Iyä*sus*) features stories which portray Jews negatively, but these episodes are usually simply extended versions of the Passion narrative rather than an independent elaboration of "evil Jews".[57]

Comparable terms are also found in the miracles of St. Zärʾa Buruk; Jews are described as transgressors of faith, evil Jews, and crucifiers of Christ (Ricci 1979, 94). In a praise poem, Saint Zärʾa Buruk is invoked as "born among thousands of righteous […] destroyer of the food for the soul of his enemies (nemesis) the Jews."[58]

References to Jews in Theological Works

The early fifteenth-century church scholar Giyorgis of Sägla dedicated an entire elaborate work, the *Mäṣḥafä Məṣṭir* (*Book of Mystery*), to the fight against heretic thoughts which he perceived to have infiltrated the church. The text is divided into thirty homiletic treatises "to be read on the

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55   This is not a phenomenon particular to Ethiopia, but was introduced (along with local anti-Jewish feelings) through translating Marian Miracles from Europe; see examples for Marian narratives from Toledo (Cerulli 1943, 301–305).

56   See Annex 2 for further examples.

57   As with the *Miracles of Mary*, the corpus of *Miracles of Jesus* is not unified; one of the oldest known manuscripts (Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Cerulli Etiopico 238) contains 25 miracles, while modern Ethiopian editions contain over 130 miracles (*Täʾammərä Iyäsus*, anon., 2001/02; cf. Witakowski 1995, 280).

58   እምነ፡ አእላፍ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ ዘርአ፡ ቡሩክ፡ ዉሉድ፡፡ ያጥፍኡ፡ እስከ፡ ነፍሶሙ፡ ለአጽራሪከ፡ አይሁድ፡፡ (from the manuscript Ethio-Spare Nəḥbi, Nəḥbi Qəddus Mikaʾel, NSM-015, fol. 74ra), cf. Ricci (1979, 166).

major feasts of the liturgical year," (Bausi 2007, 942) each treaty exposing one heretical doctrine. Chapter 10 directly confronts one of Giyorgis' contemporaries, called Bitu, about whom he writes: "Bitu, on the other hand, claims to be a Christian, but in his heart he is not a Christian. In his mind he says, 'I am baptized', but in his religious belief he is not baptized."[59] The word Jew is never used by Giyorgis, but his polemic creates a clear image of Bitu as one who never truly embraced Christianity, i.e. a Jew.

Several of the Ethiopian liturgical texts (*Anaphoras*)[60] include short negative mentions of Jews or Muslims. In the *Anaphora of St. Jacob of Serug* is written, "At that time on Friday the evil Jews crucified thee on the tree of the cross in the likeness of the sign of the cross [...]" (Marcos Daoud 1954, 223).[61] In the *Anaphora of St. Mary* it reads, "Now we hear the wicked Jews and the unrighteous Ishmaelites, who, being without understanding, say God is one person and one body, they are of a blind heart" (Marcos Daoud 1954, 111).[62] The Amharic commentary on this *Anaphora* features another polemic stating, "[You shall cause] fear in the demons, the heretics and the Jews,"[63] again equating Jews with the most negative forms.

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59 ወቢቱሰ፡ ይሰሚ፡ ርእሶ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ወበሕሊና፡ ሁሰ፡ ኢክርስቱን፡ ይብል፡ በሕሊናሁ፡ ጥሙቅ፡ አነ፡ ወበሃይማኖቱሰ፡ ኢጥሙቅ፡ (Yaqob Beyene 1990, 184, text; 111, tr.).

60 Twenty different *Anaphoras* exist in the Ethiopian Church in total, more than in any other church.

61 ዓርብ፡ አሜሃ፡ እኩያን፡ አይሁድ፡ ዲበ፡ ዕፀ፡ ሰቀሉከ፡ በአምሳለ፡ ዝንቱ፡ ትእምርተ፡ መስቀል፡ [...] (*Mäṣḥafä Qəddase* 1957/58, 156).

62 ናሁ፡ ንሰምዖሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፡ እኩያን፡ ወለእስማኤላውያን፡ ጊጉያን፡ እለ፡ ይብሉ፡ ፩ዱ፡ ገጽ፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ ወ፩ዱ፡ አካል፡ በኢለብዎቶሙ፡ ዕውራነ፡ ልብ፡ እሙንቱ፡ (*Maṣḥafa Qəddase* 1957/58, 68).

63 መፍራት፡ በአጋንንት፡ በመናፍቃን፡ በአይሁስ፡ (Böll 1998, 125, tr.; 297, text).

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In a homily in honour of Saturday Sabbath by Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, the author accuses Jews of being friends of heretics: "O you heretic, enemy of the truth, friend of the Jews, why do you deny the personhood of Trinity?"[64]

Mythical References to Jews in Quasi-historical Notes or Mytho-legends

Besides the stories found in the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* about the Queen of Sheba, Solomon, and their son Məniläk, there is another important legend which centres around Aksum, its religious identity, and around a woman.

Around the year 960, the power of the Aksumite Kingdom came to an end. As is often the case for this period in Ethiopian history, only few sources exist; only three originate in Ethiopia and cannot be dated with certainty. Two streams of legendary material are interwoven to explain the rapid loss of importance of Aksum. Sources from the outside help shed some light on actual historic events.

Three Ethiopian inscriptions report of the victory of Ḥaḍani Danʾel over the last Aksumite ruler and how the former subjugated the latter into vassal status.[65] Danʾel, who probably originated from regions south of the Askumite Kingdom, ruled the region for some time from his newly found capital Kuʿbar.[66] The Aksumite Kingdom suffered losses in other areas, as

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64   አዐላዊ፡ ፀራ፡ ለጽድቅ፡ ወርኮሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፤ ለመንት፡ ትክሕድ፡ ግጸዌ፡ ሥላሴ፡ እንዘ፡ ጥሙቅ፡ አንተ፡ በስመ፡ ሥላሴ። (Getatchew Haile 1982b, 196, text; 220, translation).

65   The inscriptions are crudely written and are partly illegible, yet the information they provide is of crucial importance (Krencker and von Lüpke 1913, 59f. ["Thron Nr. 23"]; Littmann 1913, 42–48, nos. 12–14; Bernand, Drewes, and Schneider 1991, 278–84, nos. 193, 194 [Tome 1]; Fiaccadori 2005).

66   There is no convincing identification of this town, and different later towns have been suggested (Ankobär, Gondär, Roha/Lalibäla). The city is, however, mentioned from the

well; for example, the Red Sea trade had been taken over mostly by Muslim merchants living in coastal areas. Through the shift of the capital to Kuʿbar, Aksum city and Adulis lost their role as trade posts, and the minting of coins (Kaplan 1992, 42) had long ended.[67] The church also suffered from this demise and had to survive without a consecrated Bishop for over fifty years.[68] At some point, there must have been three contestants to the see, Peṭros, Fiqṭor, and Minas, none of whom was accepted in Aksum or actually officiated the position.[69] At the same time, and this is when the negative

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tenth century onwards by Arab writers (Tadesse Tamrat 1970, 88; Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 223; for an extensive bibliography see Muth 2007).

67   Aksumite coinage was of relatively high value, some exemplars were even found in South India, indicating their usage also in long-distance trade. Moreover, due to the inscriptions on the coins, it is possible to establish royal succession, the change from pagan to Christian beliefs, as well as the decline of the usage of the Greek language in Aksum (Hahn 2003).

68   Since Frumentius had been ordained Metropolitan of Ethiopia by the Coptic Patriarch in Alexandria, the Ethiopian Church depended on the Coptic. New bishops, Abuna (or Pappas), had to be sent from Egypt, a service which often cost Ethiopian rulers a lot of money (cf. Levi 1992, 245). But without this Abuna, the Ethiopian Church was leaderless and could not appoint new clergy or consecrate new churches. In addition, the Emperor was crowned by God's grace through the Abuna.

69   Peṭros was apparently the only one officially sent by the Patriarch in Alexandria; however, Fiqṭor and Minas both presented forged letters accusing Peṭros of being an imposter. Peṭros was deposed by Minas and Fiqṭor, and for some time Minas acted as Abuna. However, a later, real letter from Patriarch Cosmas revealed Minas' treason, he was unseated and executed. Peṭros had died in the meantime, and Cosmas refused to send a new Abuna. The king (whose name remains unknown) forced Peṭros' assistant to take the position, which further enraged Cosmas, and caused a deep breach in the relations of Aksum and Alexandria, which lasted for a few centuries. Between the years 921 and 979, five consecutive Patriarchs had refused to ordain a new bishop for Ethiopia (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 223; Levi 1992, 246–249, see 338–340 for the Appendix 1 for the Gəʿəz text of this story; Munro-Hay 2005b; Taddesse Tamrat 1972, 39–40). Finally, the new Patriarch Philotheus (ca. 989–1003) send a new Abuna, by the name Danʾel, after he had received pleading letters from the Ethiopian monarch to have mercy and send a new Abuna. This letter was included in the Ethiopian Church's Hagiographic Calender

character of Jews resurfaces in legends, the country was suffering from yet another disaster.

Since sources are once again scarce, it is even more interesting to note how the tradition accused a Jew, and above all a Jewess, of being responsible for the decline of the Aksumite kingdom. The legend holds that Ǝsato,[70] also known as Queen Judith/Gudit, was "a resident of Aksum, perhaps a member of the royal family reduced to prostitution. She was tricked by a local priest, who sought to have sexual relations with her. Disgraced and mutilated, she left Ethiopia. She met a Jewish ruler whom she married and convinced to destroy Aksum in revenge for the indignity she had suffered" (Kaplan 2005, 376).[71] She ruled for about thirty to forty years.[72]

It is often stated that the Judith legend is a counternarrative to the Queen of Sheba. Where the latter was a pious virgin, Judith was the opposite; some sources even claim that she became a prostitute. The Queen of Sheba venerated the Ark, and Judith wanted to destroy it (Kaplan and Salamon 2002). Finally, Makǝdda's verdict that no woman should ever reign over Ethiopia again was contradicted by Judith (Abbink 1990, 421; Levi 1992, 242; Kaplan 2005, 376). A tradition collected by James Bruce even states that Judith killed all the princess from the Solomonic lineage imprisoned at Däbrä Dammo, some 400 in number, thus completely erasing the Solomonic line (Bruce 1791, 167).[73] We hence have the confrontation of

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"Sǝnkǝssar" (Synaxarium) for Ḫǝdar 12 (November 20) (Perruchon 1893b; Colin 1988, 288 [56]–291 [59]; Andersen 2000, 34–35).

70   Clearly a mythical name, which translates as "the Fire".

71   The report uses very neutral vocabulary here, ወነደገት፡ ክርስትና፡ ወኮነት፡ አይሁዳዊት፡ አስመ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ውእቱ፡ ብእሲሃ፡, "She denied Christianity and embraced Judaism, because her husband was a Jew" (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 228, 229).

72   Tadesse Tamrat (1972, 40) calculates the date of Judith's assumption of power to ca. 945.

73   In later times it was a custom in Ethiopia to imprison sons and other relatives of monarchs to avoid any trouble for possible contestants to the throne.

a good Israelite from the Solomonic line and a violent Jewish campaigner. In the *Book of Light,* Zärʾa Yaʿəqob stated later that Queen Judith "learned from Satan".[74]

Despite, or perhaps because of, her bad reputation, the Beta Israel did accept her as one of their ancestors. She might have been an "evil woman",[75] but she represented the victory of "Jewish" people over the ruling Solomonic dynasty and was thus idealized by many. Judith was not only perceived as an ancestor; the name also seems to have become the title for later Beta Israel "queens", or wives of Beta Israel leaders, and appears in many chronicles (Quirin 1992, 75–76, and especially 243, fn. 186; Bruce 1791, 124; Stern 1862, 186).[76]

Jon Abbink calls this episode "First Echoes of History in the Oral Tradition of the Beta Israel" (Abbink 1990, 420), to which one could add "and in the oral tradition of the Christian population, too". What may be established with a fair degree of certainty is that there was a successful ruler by the name of Haḍani Danʾel who ruled over the Aksumite kingdom, but he was defeated by a female warrior-queen "of the South", often

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74   ወአስተቃስሞነ፡ ብዙኅ፡ ሀሎ፡ ዘይገብርዎ፡ ሰብአ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ በበ፡ ሀገሮሙ፡ ዘያውፅእ፡ እምእምልኮቱ፡ ለእግዚአብሔርC፣ በከመ፡ መህረፆሙ፡ ጉዲት፡ በከመ፡ ትምህረት፡ ይእቲ፡ እምሰይጣን፡ (Conti Rossini 1965, 51, text), "There are many divinations which the people of Ethiopia practise, each in his country, which distract one from the worship of God, as Gudit taught them who in turn learnt from Satan" (cf. Getatchew 1980, 207).

75   ወእምድኅሬሁ፡ ነግሥት፡ እኪት፡ ብእሲት፡ ወዐማዒት፡ ትውልድ፡ ዕሉት፡ (Perruchon 1893, 365) "After him reigned an evil and unjust woman, from the tribe of infidels"; Evil but "a woman of great beauty, and talents for intrigue" (Bruce 1791, 167; cf. Kaplan 1992, 46; Levi 1992, 87; Anderson 2000, 39).

76   The male counterpart is often called Gedewon/Gideon, and is also traced back to famous ancestors in the oral traditions. In Christian sources, St. Yared's uncle and teacher was called Gedewon (Conti Rossini 1904, 8, text; 7, translation; Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972a, 165; for an overview of the sources see Quirin 2005). In Beta Israel legends, St. Yared is sometimes of "Jewish" birth himself, and son of a Gedewon, who was forced to convert to Christianity; interviews conducted by Quirin (1992, 25, and 223, fn. 91).

identified with Banū l-Hamwiyya from the kingdom of Damot to the south-west of the Aksumite Kingdom.[77] Finally, there are two sources, foreign but contemporary, which confirm the story. The Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal ventured out on several missionary and trading trips between the years 943 and 977, reporting that "the country of the Abyssinians has been ruled by a woman for many years: she has killed the king of the Abyssinians who was titled Ḥaḍani. Until today she rules with complete independence over her own country and the bordering areas of the territory of the Ḥaḍani in the southern part of Abyssinia. It is a vast limitless country, with secluded [areas] and deserts difficult to cross" (Kramers and Wiet 1964, 56).

To this, the *History of the Three Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* adds the report that during the reign of Patriarch Philotheus (989–1003), "the King of Abssinia (al-Ḥabash) sent to the king of Nubia (al-Nūba) a youth whose name was George (Girgis), and made known to him how the Lord has chastened him, he and the inhabitants of his land. It was that a woman, a queen of Banū l-Hamwiyya had revolted against him and against his country" (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 223; cf. Kaplan 1992, 45; Anderson 2000, 34–35).[78] The letter further underlines the dire position the former powerful Aksumite kingdom was in: "[the lands] are abandoned without a shepherd, and our bishops and our priests are dead, and the churches are ruined..." (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972a, 224; cf. Taddesse Tamrat 1972, 41).

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77   Of the Damoti Kingdom it is known that there were female leaders (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 121; Kaplan 1992, 45 and especially 179, fn. 54).

78   It is often stated that Sawirus Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (Severus, Bishop of el-Ashmunayn) was the author of the *History of the Patriarchs*, but this is only partly true. Sawirus began compiling the reports on the lives of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church, but only reached the year 849 (and the fifty-second Patriarch, Joseph). Afterwards, the recordings were continued by other authors. Michael of Damru, bishop of Tinnis, was responsible for the report of the life of Philotheus, the sixty-third Patriarch (Swanson 2011, 84–88).

Another analysis of the sources on Judith is given by Knud Tage Andersen. As mentioned earlier, the statement in the *Kəbrä Nägäśt,* that Makədda declared "no woman should rule over Ethiopia again", appears to be a later addition to the text. Similar "anti-female" interpolations are also found in this letter of the Ethiopian king, who approached the Egyptian Patriarch Philotheus. The letter features two surprising references to the queen of the Banū l-Hamwiyya, which might not have been part of the original story but later interpolations. "If one were to remove these two passages from the text it would not give the impression that anything is missing at all. On the contrary, the text seems smooth and coherent with a natural integrity" (Andersen 2000, 35).

Andersen claims that the entire Judith story was fashioned by later Amhara[79] rulers to establish their own legitimacy by proving the illegitimacy of their predecessors, the Zagʷe (Andersen 2000, 36). He further speculates that as a member of the Aksumite nobility, and here he is following the Judith legend again, the queen herself might have been part of the succession struggle and killed her unsuitable and corrupt elder brother (or other relative), known from the history of Minas and Peṭros (Andersen 2000, 41). In a predominantly patriarchal society, this claim to the power by a woman might have caused the creation of such an anti-female legend. Having her convert to Judaism just adds to her negative identity.

The entire Judith-episode suffers from several inconsistencies. It is curious to note in the legend that despite her alleged Jewishness, Judith was said to have tried to destroy the Ark of the Covenant (Sergew Hable Sellasie 1972b, 113). The story completely ignores the fact that the Ark would have been of incredible importance to Jews. In accordance with this account, we

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79   Amhara is both a region and an ethnic group in Ethiopia, south of the former Aksumite kingdom, bordering Lake Tana. Amhara became the centre of many important monasteries and was also populated by a considerable number of Beta Israel at a later time.

know from other oral traditions, admittedly from a much later period, that the Beta Israel were proud of the Ark of the Covenant, and some legends even claim that the Beta Israel are actually the only ones with access to it: "the walls [of the sanctuary] magically open if a Jew approaches" (Gobat 1834, 322–323).[80] Steven Kaplan points out that the "claim that Judith intended to extirpate the Solomonic line is highly questionable in light of contemporary evidence that her primary adversary was the Ḥaḍani, who had already sharply curtailed the Aksumite king's power" (Kaplan 1992, 46). In addition, should Judith and the queen of the Banū l-Hamwiyya be one and the same person, another problem comes up. The latter name clearly suggests an Arabic, possibly Islamic, background, as also stated by Andersen: "but since the Amharans regarded this queen as cruel and unchristian one cannot but wonder if, at a much later time, they would have thought of her as the queen of an Arabic/Muslim people that more or less successfully had fought for independence and freedom in its relation to the Ethiopian kingdom" (Andersen 2000, 37).

As tempting as it is to believe in Judith's Jewish faith, it "rather serves to emphasize her unChristian behaviour, in this case both rebellion against the Christian kingdom and denial and destruction of the Christian faith" (Levi 1992, 88).

After Aksum sunk into oblivion, a new, powerful dynasty emerged, the Zagʷe, famous for the rock-hewn churches of Lalibäla. The transition of

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80   A similar oral tradition, from Gobat, is reported by Qes Asres Yayehe (1995, 63), who states that a number of Beta Israel monks had a vision prophesizing that they were the real Israelites: "If the Aksum Tsion Tabot, the Ark of the Covenant (believed by Ethiopians to be in the Aksum Church) is truly the one that Moses received from the Lord G-d, nothing can hinder us from repossessing it. The Lord G-d will now hand it over back to us". A group of Beta Israel set out to travel to Aksum, marching around the Church of the Ark in secret for seven nights, hoping to receive a divine sign, but to no avail; most of them starved on their way back to their home regions.

power was described in several king lists, and the following passage from a *Kəbrä nägäśt* manuscript underlines the fact that those who came after the Aksumites were usurpers and not of noble Israelite birth:

ወእምድኅሬሁ፡ ተሐይደ፡ መንግሥት፡ ለሕዝብ፡ እለ፡ ኢኮነ፡ እምነገደ፡ ዳዊት፡ ወሕዝበ፡ እስራኤል። በከመ፡ ይቤ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አነ፡ ኣቀንዖሙ፡ በዘኢኮነ፡ ሕዝብ፡[81]

"After this, the rule was taken away [and given to] people which are not from the lineage of David and people of Israel. As the Lord says: 'I will move them with jealousy with those that are not a people'[82]".

We thus have different explanations for the decline of the Aksumite kingdom. All are said to be non-Israelites or non-Solomonids, with the difference that the Zagʷe are undisputed Christians and Judith was allegedly Jewish.[83]

The Zagʷe dynasty lasted only from 1137 to 1270, and their entire rule was affected by violent fights over succession. Yet all their kings and queens came to be depicted as devout Christians, often even called Saintly-Kings.[84] Within the literature of this period, strife with Jews was not

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81 Manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque National de France, Éthiopien 146, fol. 61ra. The king list is given at the end of a *Kəbrä Nägäśt* text, but these lists are very common and found in numerous manuscripts. Slight variations occur in each of them, compare for example Conti Rossini 1895, 4: ተሐደሰት፡ መንግሥት፡ ኀበ፡ ካልእ፡ ሕዝብ፡ እለ፡ ኢኮነ፡ እምነገደ፡ እስራኤል። —"The rule was renewed with another people, which are not from the lineage of Israel", and Dillmann (1853, 349) who adds to this quote: እለ፡ ዛጕ። – "which were the Zagwe", cf. a similar line in Sergew Hable Sellasie (1972b, 122). For obscure reasons, most secondary works on this episode omit the original text, providing only a translation (e.g. Dillmann 1853, 349; Bassett 1882, 98 (tr.); Conti Rossini 1895, 4).

82 Deut. 32, 21.

83 It can be assumed that Ḥaḍani Danʾel was a Christian (Fiaccadori 2005, 84).

84 In a twelfth-century chronicle, wrongly attributed to Abu Ṣālih, it is stated that "all the kings of Abyssinia are priests, and celebrate the liturgy within the sanctuary" (Fiaccadori 2010, 212), which might allude to the faithfulness of the Zagʷe rulers.

a common topic. Thus, conflict between Christians and Beta Israel or any other group which might have been identified as Jews does not appear to have been a central concern at the time.

The Amhara lord Yǝkunno Amlak is said to have overthrown the Zagʷe dynasty in 1270 and presented himself as a powerful representative of the old elite, and as having re-established the Solomonic dynasty after the Aksumite demise. His claims to belong to the Solomonic line were weak, however, and others in the northern province of Tǝgray tried to prove that they had better claims, which probably resulted in the shaping of the *Kǝbrä Nägäśt*. Suddenly the Solomonic origin of the Ethiopian royalty became more important than ever before. Regardless of Yǝkunno Amlak's intentions, Emperor Amdä Ṣǝyon (r. 1314–1344) is the one monarch recognized to have founded the Solomonic state (Kaplan 1992, 54).

The entire period from the end of the Aksumite Kingdom to the emergence of Amdä Ṣǝyon's mostly stable state is full of contradictions in the perception of individuals. "Solomonic, or Israelite" elements were highly valued by the Christian elite, but at the same time everything evil which plagued their kingdom was seen as Jewish. Christians, like the Zagʷe, who lacked this Israelite background were perceived as equally wicked, as enemies and destroyers of the Aksumite culture.

Up to this point, the images of Jews dealt with here do not actually refer to real Jews present (or rather not present) at the time and place of the origin of the stories. This changes in the fourteenth century.

More (or Less) Precise References to Jews From the Fourteenth Century on – First Real Traces of the Beta Israel?

The Beta Israel present a special case in the Ethiopian history. Even though their liturgy and other ritual services were based on written scriptures, nothing has come down to us written by their own hands to tell anything about their history; no historical texts, no legal documents, not even hagiographies of their most revered holy men.[85] If the opinion of almost all scholars can be trusted, they themselves did not even know how to write, but rather commissioned their manuscripts from their Christian neighbours.[86] Thus, when reconstructing the history of the Beta Israel, scholars are forced to rely on the written documents of the neighbours of the Beta Israel and the Beta Israel's own oral traditions.

In ca. 1332, we have "the first clear mention of Judaized groups around Lake Tana in the chronicle of the war of Amdä Ṣeyon" (Kaplan, 1992, 55), when the king sent out troops to fight the rebels "which resemble the crucifiers of Christ, the Jews, which are the inhabitants of Samien, Waggera, Ṣalamt and Wägade."[87] "They used to be Christians but now they deny

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85   One of the very few exemptions is a short note on a religious dispute from a Beta Israel probably written in the nineteenth century, though referring to events a few centuries earlier (Leslau 1946–47). As a matter of fact, it is within the scope of the JewsEast project (see acknowledgments) to examine Beta Israel manuscripts for possible notes regarding their history. Oftentimes, marginal notes in manuscripts have been ignored, but they are known to contain valuable information on the environment of their composition.

86   Bruce (1791, 125) mentions this fact already, followed by many modern scholars (Kaplan 1992, 3). For a detailed article on the manuscript culture, see Pankhurst (1995).

87   Marrassini (1993, 69), editing the same text, notes "Ṣagade".

Christ, like his crucifiers, the Jews".[88] They are described as "the wicked Jew who sold the Lord."[89]

For the first time, a "Jewish" group is described living in areas congruent with areas which were evidently inhabited by Beta Israel in later times. Under the rule of Amdä Ṣeyon and his sons, the borders of the kingdom were enlarged and the power of their rule within was strengthened. This expansion was accompanied by the spread and new foundations of churches and monasteries.

Such information is found in the *Vita* of the thirteenth/fourteenth-century Saint Gäbrä Iyäsus, in which a Jew (the leader of a larger group of Jews) by the name of Zena Gabo is mentioned.[90] According to the text, the Jews had fled the destruction of the Second Temple under Titus (Conti Rossini 1937/39, 446) and now lived in the region of Enfraz. Gäbrä Iyäsus was sent there to proselytize, and subsequently founded the monastery of Däbrä San in the region. Zena Gabo, a Beta Israel dignitary, was the first to turn to the Christian faith. He was followed by his daughter, who was healed by the saint from a "snake in her stomach", and who was so beautiful that the king fell in love with her and married her. Several of their children are supposed to have become monks or priests in the convent of Däbrä San. In the manuscript of the *Vita of St. Gäbrä Iyäsus*, which was admittedly only written in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, a curious element is found. Instead of the Christian trinitarian formula "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit", the final paragraph is initiated with the Beta Israel formula "blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel". This has led to the

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88   Cf. Kropp 1994, 15 (tr.). See also further below in this article.

89   ይሁዳ፡ ጽልሕው፡ ሠያጤ፡ እግዚኡ፡ (Marrassini 1993, 69, text).

90   Conti Rossini 1937/1939, 445–449. The text, however, was written centuries after the life of the Saint. Unfortunately, Conti Rossini provided only a translation into Italian and not the original text. See Annex 3 for a summary of the account.

speculation that a certain Beta Israel influence was still felt in Däbrä San (Conti Rossini 1937/39, 451). Unfortunately, despite the quite lengthy story of Zena Gabo and his conversion, we do not get any precise information about the Jews of the region or their lifestyle.

The language and overall tone towards the Jews is extremely negative in this text.[91] Jews are compared to dogs, their religion is literally said to be "inferior to that of dogs".[92] Jews are presented as weak in their original faith and as easily convinced to drop their religion and convert to Christianity.

Interestingly, Gäbrä Iyäsus was himself part of a minority group, the Ǝwosṭateans,[93] which suffered from the persecutions of hegemonic Christians since around the year 1300. The group was considered as heretic and "Jewish" by the ruling clerics and for around a century after their emergence, the Ǝwosṭateans presented a serious threat to established doctrines. "Despite the violent opposition of kings, bishops, and other Church leaders, the Ēwosṭatian movement flourished in the frontier areas of the north where they enjoyed local support" (Kaplan 1984, 39). Other dissident groups, like the Stephanites, had a slightly more positive image of Jews, as will be shown below. There is, however, also the account by *Gädlä Gäbrä Masiḥ*, another member of the Stephanite movement, which describes how a Beta Israel (here called Falasha) saved the life of the Saint.[94] Gäbrä Masiḥ was close to starving, due to extreme fasting, when

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91   See Annex 3.

92   "Quel Giudeo rise, e disse: 'Forse che la mia religione è peggiore della religione d'un cane? e forse che la religione d'un cane è migliore della religione mia?' Gli disse il padre nostro, custode della legge: 'Si, è peggiore la tua religione, ed è migliore la religione del cane' (Conti Rossini 1937/39, 447).

93   He was one of the disciples that accompanied Ǝwosṭatewos, the founder of the movement, into exile to Armenia, where they stayed for fourteen years, see Lusini (1993, 116).

94   This *Vita*, probably written in the sixteenth to seventeenth century, is the first Ethiopian source to connect the words Jew and Falasha (Kaplan 1985, 278).

the Jew Arämawi found and nourished him for months until he recovered from his exertion (Kaplan 1985). The story is very neutral in its tone, contrary to the Gäbrä Iyäsus account.

Another narrative is frequently featured in the sources which contrasts the Gäbrä Iyäsus story in many ways. It claims that it is a heretic Christian who turned towards the Beta Israel, became a Jew, and introduced monasticism to them or functioned as a writer of their holy scriptures. The phrase "a Jew who was a Christian before", as well as the *topos* of a Christian converting to Judaism, is found on several occasions in chronicles, in the texts by Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, in the *Vita Yafqərännä Ǝgziʾ*, in the *Miracles of Mary*, in the Beta Israel oral tradition on Abba Sabra and Ṣägga Amlak, and in many more sources.[95]

Chronologically speaking, the first of such figures was Qozmos, about whom we know from the fourteenth-century *Vita* of the Christian monk Yafqərännä Ǝgziʾ, who lived during the reign of king Dawit II (r. 1388–1412). Qozmas was a Christian monk who fell into disgrace with his community due to his extreme ideas on asceticism and his refusal of all cooked food including the Eucharist. He fled their persecution into deserted areas in which people with Jewish faith, "*Haymanote ayhudi*", lived.[96] Since he was

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95   ትካትሰ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ እሙንቱ፡ ወይእዜሰ፡ ክሕዱ፡ ክርስቶሃ፡ ከመ፡ አይሁድ፡ ሰቃልያን።, "Formerly they were Christians, but now they deny Christ like the crucifying Jews [lit. the Jews Crucifiers]" (cf. Kropp 1994, 11, text, and Marrassini 1993, 68, text). አይሁዳዊ፡ ቀዲሙሰ፡ ነበረ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡, "A Jew who was however, first a Christian", Getatchew Haile 1986, 197; The author presents an entire miracle of Mary here, which elaborates the story of Christians converting to Judaism and being punished for it. For further references see also Getatchew Haile (1980, 194), Quirin (1993, 303).

96   Abbink 1990, 431, Wajnberg 1936, 57. The Jews are depicted here in the most negative form: ወሰብአ፡ […] ይነብሩ፡ በሃይማኖተ፡ አይሁድ፡ ወእኩያን፡ ፈድፋደ፡ ወቀሊላነ፡ ልብ፡ እሙንቱ። ወሶበ፡ ርእዮ፡ እሙንቱሰ፡ ዕልዋን፡ ለቆይሞስ፡, "the people [in these regions] lived in the faith of the Jews, they were very evil people and light at heart [lightheaded]. When these heretics saw Qozmos" (Wajnberg 1936, 56, text).

a learned man and knew how to write, he was welcomed with open arms and translated the *Orit* (Octateuch) for them. He became something of a messianic figure, and later led them against the Christian ruler Dawit II in open rebellion.[97] The Beta Israel managed to score some victories but were finally defeated by the king's troops, and Qozmos was killed in battle (Wajnberg 1936, 50–59).

It is noteworthy that scholars have readily adopted the story of Qozmos as a historical indication of the development of the Jewish community, probably because it has been transmitted in written form. In the Beta Israel tradition, he seems to be unknown; when we examine the oral traditions collected in interviews, it turns out that Qozmos is rarely (if at all) featured in them.[98]

Emperor Amdä Ṣəyon was the renovator of the Solomonic dynasty and had engaged in some doctrinal disputes, for example with the Ǝwosṭateans. They struggled around the veneration of the Sabbath, which, however, was not the main goal for Amdä Ṣəyon. His son Dawit II was also less interested in theological debates and cared about religious dissident groups like the *Ayhud* mostly when they threatened his rule, not his faith. One of the subsequent rulers, Yəshaq, son of Dawit II, on the other hand, was known for his "harsh treatment of religious dissidents" (Kaplan 1992, 57).[99] However, he tried to include different ethnic (and religious) groups into his feudal system. At some point in time he had appointed the "Jew"

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97 ወእሙንቱሰ፡ ጽልሕዋን፡ ሕዝብ፡ ተበሐሉ፡ በበይናቲሆሙ፡ እንዘ፡ ይብሉ፡ ዝኩ፡ እንጋ፡ ዘይቤሉ፡ ነቢያት፡ በእንቲአሁ፡ ይመጽእ፡ ሠረቃዊ፡ ወልደ፡ እግዚአብሔር።, "When these evil people discussed among them: 'Is it him that the prophets spoke about: That the son of God will raise from the East?'" (Wajnberg 1936, 56, text).

98 Cf. for example the works by Krempel (1973), Leslau (1974), Quirin (1988, 1993), Kaufmann Shelemay (1989).

99 The Arabic chronicler Maqrizi calls Yəsḥaq responsible for "rooting out utterly all the Muslims living in Abyssinia" (cited after Tadesse Tamra 1972, 154).

Bet Ajer as governor over Semien and other areas. Soon there was a fight, when Bet Ajer punished one of Yəsḥaq's own nephews and refused to show up before of the king to explain himself. He was hunted down by Yəsḥaq's soldiers and decapitated. Some Beta Israel groups that remained faithful to the king were rewarded fiefs for their cooperation (Taddesse Tamrat 1972, 200). On the other hand, Yəsḥaq was aware of Beta Israel's different religious orientation and sought to bring this "chronic problem" to an end by imposing Christianity on the "rebelling infidels" (Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 201). He passed the decree that "he who is baptized in the Christian religion, may inherit the land of his father; otherwise let him be a *Falasi.*"[100] A marginal note to this passage in the manuscript reads, "Since then, the Beta Israel have been called *Falashoch*" (Kaplan 1992, 183, fn. 22).

What is probably the largest number of negative mentions of Jews is found in the fifteenth-century writings of Emperor Zärʾa Yaʿəqob. In his chronicle, the king is frequently called "equal to the righteous disciples" as well as "destroyer of the Jews".[101] Zärʾa Yaʿəqob is said to have authored a number of texts himself, and additional texts were composed under his authority in the royal scriptorium.[102] In his *Book of the Nativity* (*Mäṣḥafä Milad*) and the *Epistle of Humanity* (*Ṭomarä təsbəʾət*), polemics against Jews are found on almost every other page.[103] Calling Jews "idolaters" or "cursed

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100 *Falashoch* "A landless wanderer" (Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 201).

101 ዘውገ፡ ጎሩያን፡ ተልሚድ፡ ወሥራዊሆሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፡ (Perruchon 1893a, 103; cf. also Dillmann 1884, 34).

102 The authorship of most sources cannot be established sufficiently. It is known that Zärʾa Yaʿəqob authored many texts himself, but many were composed by his ካህናተ፡ ደብተራ፡, "the Clergy of the (Royal) Camp", whose names remain unknown (Getatchew Haile 1992, 3).

103 He wrote not only against Jews, but against idol worshipping, the veneration of evil demons and spirits, magic actions, and much more. Getatchew Haile describes the writings of the emperor in this way (1980, 226): "Like most of Emperor Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's writings, the *Ṭomarä təsbəʾt* was written because of one particular problem. The Emperor

Jews" are among the milder epithets in his work, in contrast to the following passage in his *Book of Light* (*Maṣḥafä Bərhan*): "But you, o Jew, you fetid and rotten mouth, eater of his sons and daughters like Hyenas, and eaters of excrements[104] like a dog [...]".[105]

Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's father Dawit II already promoted the cult of Mary, but his son excelled him in his zealous fight for the correct veneration of Mary. Moreover, he was striving to cleanse the Christian Church of Ethiopia from alleged Jewish and heretic influences as well as magic and otherwise unwanted elements.

Ethiopian Church history in this period becomes very complex, as there was a good number of groups which refused to accept the innovations of the emperor and some groups split from official church doctrine. Severe punishment and persecution of these groups were the result, and the alleged "Jews" were among those who suffered most from the emperor. In his text *Ṭomarä təsbəʾt* (*Epistle of Humanity*), which is fully dedicated to the fight against heretics, a Jew is always associated with a magician and an idolater (Getatchew 1980, 212). Furthermore, in the *Ṭomarä təsbəʾt*, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob describes the punishment for idolaters and wrong-doers: "And when you die, your lot will be in the fire of hell. If you are a priest, your priesthood will be nullified, and although you are a Christian, you will be called a Jew and an idolater."[106]

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was convinced that his opponents were using satanic power to destroy him and take his throne. Although the homilies of *Ṭomarä təsbəʾt* seem to address themselves to the general problem of superstition and magical practices in Ethiopia, they were actually written against his personal enemies to justify their execution [...]."

104 This could be a reference to 2 King 18:27.

105 ወአንተሰ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ጽዮአ፡ አፍ፡ ወስሕቡብ፡ በላዔ፡ ደቂቁ፡ ወአዋልዲሁ፡ ከመ፡ ዝአብ፡ ወበላዔ፡ ኮስሕ፡ ከመ፡ ከልብ፡ (Conti Rossini 1965, 8, text).

106 ወሶበ ሄ፡ ትመውት፡ ይከውን፡ መክፈልትከ፡ ውስተ፡ ገሀነም፡ እሳት፡፡ እመኒ፡ ኮንከ፡ ካህነ፡ ትሥዐረ፡ ክህነትከ፡ ወለእመኒ፡ ኮንከ፡ ክርስትያናዊ፡ ተሰመይከ፡ አይሁደ፡ ወመጠዓዊ፡፡ (Getatchew 1991, 97,

For the emperor, Jews, magicians, and sorcerers presented the same level of wickedness and are usually equated in his texts. Despite this, he distinguishes between magicians, who cast spells and predict the future, and Jews, who refuse to prostrate in front of Mary. Among these are counted the Stephanites, the followers of their spiritual leader Ǝsṭifanos. In his *Book of Light,* the emperor writes: "Those children of Ǝsṭifa [Stephan] truly are Jews, they refuse to prostrate to Mary the twofold Virgin, and to the cross of the only begotten Son."[107]

This rhetorical association between the Stephanites, whom Zärʾa Yaʿǝqob considered to be heretical, and Jews is also reflected in the writings of the Stephanites themselves. In a text by an anonymous follower of Ǝsṭifanos, it becomes obvious that for the Stephanites themselves, it was clear that they were neither Jews nor heretics, but rather defenders of the true orthodox faith: "He [the king] smote down our father St. Ǝsṭifanos and tortured him very much and imprisoned him until he finished (his combat), just because he taught the Orthodox Faith […]. He [the king] severely tortured his [Ǝsṭifanos'] followers too, after him, and called them enemies of Mary, likening them, for the public, with the Jews, because of their refusal to prostrate themselves before the king, and so he executed them" (Getatchew 1980, 227).[108]

In the beautiful, poetic canticle in honour of Mary, *Maḫlete Ṣege* (*Canticle of the Flower*), further reference to the equation of Jews and Stephanites

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text; 78, tr.).

107 ወእሙንቱሰ፡ ደቂቀ፡ እስጢፋ፡ በአማን፡ አይሁድ፡ እሙንቱ፡ እለ፡ አበዩ፡ ስጊደ፡ ለማርያም፡ ድንግል፡ በከልኤ፡ ወለመስቀለ፡ ወልድ፡ ዋሕድ፨ (Conti Rossini 1965, 48).

108 This text excerpt is a translation provided by Getatchew Haile (1980, 227) on the basis of the manuscript Collegeville, Mn, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, EMML no. 4, ff. 159v–161v. Unfortunately, no further information about the author is provided by Getatchew Haile (most probably it is not provided in the manuscript either), nor the Gǝʿǝz text published.

is found. In stanza 38 it reads: "The Christian who says [to Mary] "I love you", but doesn't love your Miracles, is not a true Christian; he is a Jew and an enemy of your Son the Saviour." A look into the apparatus of the critical edition by Adolf Grohmann from 1919 reveals that a number of manuscripts have the variant "...is a Jew and offspring of ∃stifanos the Liar".[109]

In the *Vita of Abba Ezra*—Abba Ezra was a member of the Stephanite movement as well—we find notes on the image the court officials had about the "heretic" Stephanites. The blame for leading the Stephanites astray was indirectly put on the Jews: "there are Falashas concealed among the disciples of *Abba Yonas*; which do not bow down in front of Mary or the cross of the 'Special One'".[110] And it is further remarked: "There arrived here monks that are neither Jews nor heathens, but who do not believe in the Trinity, who do not bow in front of Mary or the cross, who do not have a *tabot* (Altar), who do not celebrate the Eucharist, and when they pray they neither say the Lord's Prayer nor the Creed."[111]

The author of the *Vita* was well aware that Jews did not perform these rituals, but in his understanding, there was no reason that the mere rejection of these rituals automatically equated the Stephanites with Jews. However, to the clerics defending the prevailing doctrine, and to mutual enemies of the Stephanites and the Beta Israel, every act that deviated from the norm posed a potential threat. Thus, using polemic language was the easiest way to discredit the Stephanites. The imagined identity of

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109 ዘሰ፡ ይብል፡ አፍቅረኪ፡ ወኢየፈቅር፡ ተአምረኪ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ኢክርስቱን፡ ውእቱ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ወፀረ፡ ወልድኪ፡ ማሕየዊ፡ [ወሥርፀ፡ እስጢፋ፡ ሐሳዊ፡] (Grohmann 1919, 84, text; 85, translation).

110 ይብሉ፡ ሀለዉ፡ ዝየ፡ ፈለሳ፡ ተሰዊሮሙ፡ በደቂቀ፡ አባ፡ ዮናስ፡ እለ፡ ኢይሰግዱ፡ ለማርያም፡ ወለመስቀለ፡ ዋሕድ፡ (Caquot 1961, 75, text; 97, translation).

111 ናሁ፡ መጽኡ፡ ዝየ፡ መነኮሳት፡ እለ፡ ኢኮኑ፡ አይሁድ፡ ወአረሚ፡ ወልቦሙ፡ አሚነ፡ ሥላሴ፡ ወኢይሰግዱ፡ ለማርያም፡ ወኢለመስቀል፡ ወአልቦሙ፡ ታቦተ፡ ወኢይቄርቡ፡ ቁርባነ፡ ወእንዘ፡ ይጼልዩ፡ ኢይብሉ፡ አቡነ፡ ዘበ፡ ሰማያት፡ ወጸሎተ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ (Caquot 1961, 76, text; 100, translation).

Jews was so negative that referring to someone as a "Jew" caused outright rejection.

In the time of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, there lived two men whose memory is preserved in Beta Israel written sources. Besides possible references to them in the writings of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, their names feature frequently in prayers and commemorative notes by Beta Israel.[112] Playing a similar role to that of Qozmos, and held in the highest esteem among the Beta Israel, are Abba Sabra, who introduced monasticism to the Beta Israel, and his disciple Ṣägga Amlak.[113] The latter is said to have been one of the sons of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, formerly called Asqal (Quirin 1988, 97), who rebelled against his father and became a Jew (Perruchon 1893a, 96–97; Quirin 1988, 94).[114] For the first time, this indicates a clear overlap of persons being called *Ayhud* by Christian authors and simultaneously being identified as members of their own group by Beta Israel.

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112   See Quirin (1988, 104, fn. 48) for a list of texts. The Beta Israel manuscript Soṭa, Soṭa Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikaʾel Mädḫane ʿAläm, SDM–021, fol. 55v, collected by the ERC project ETHIO-SPaRe: Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia Salvation, Preservation, Research, must be added to this. The manuscript is accessible through the project's database under the call number SDM-021.

113   Abba Sabra is the number one figure for basically all achievements of the Beta Israel. Besides introducing monasticism, he is said to have composed their liturgical music (see here a similar motive as St. Yared; cf. Kaufman Shelemay 1989, 225) and introduced the group's purity laws. He is also the possible author of some religious texts (Kaplan 2010, see also Krebs and Kribus, in this volume).

114   The royal chronicle of the king reports of some of his children rebelling against him and even states that some left the Christian faith and embraced Judaism. Some of his children are referred to by name, but those who embraced Judaism are not. The name Asqal is not found in Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's sources, only in oral traditions of the Beta Israel. The *Ṭomarä täsbəʾät* mentions "his brother-in-law Gälawdewos the Jew [...] That Gälawdewos became a Jew forsaking his Christianity and Christ" (ሐሙሁ፡ ገላውድዮስ፡ አይሁዳዊ (…) ወእስቱሰ፡ ገላውድዮስ፡ ኮነ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ሐዲጎ፡ ክርስትናሁ፡ ወክሒዶ፡ ክርስቶስሃ፨ Getatchew Haile 1991, 67, text; 54, translation), and "while it is tempting to try to connect this to the traditions about Ṣägga Amlak, the reference almost certainly refers to his rebellious political behaviour" (Kaplan 1992, 187, fn. 75).

Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's ambitious battle against the Jews is especially felt in his fight over the correct observance of the Sabbath. The question of the veneration of the Christian Sabbath in the Ethiopian Church has long been debated,[115] but in 1450, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob summoned a church council to settle the issue, after which the view prevailed that both days—Saturday, called *"Sabbath of the Jews"*, and Sunday—should be observed, though the Sunday Sabbath requires greater strictness.[116]

With the arrival of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, doctrinal debates, including who was a Jew or what their appropriate status should be, were no longer an inner-Ethiopian issue.[117] Ethiopian rulers and clerics were confronted with other, new challenges, which is why the analysis of the identity and images of the Beta Israel ends here.

Conclusion

Over the centuries, there have been many Christians rulers who have mistreated Jews in their country. An entire polemic rhetoric was created over the course of time which underscored Jews' role in the crucifixion of Jesus, marked them as political rebels, and linked them with demons, Muslims, sinners, and heretics of all kinds. The positive or negative value assigned to Jewishness in Christian Ethiopian texts depended on the agenda of a given author.

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115 Amdä Ṣəyon struggled with the Ǝwosṭateans already regarding the Sabbath veneration. The issue was contested in Ethiopia for centuries, and many suffered severely in occasional eruptions of violence.

116 A full analysis of the "role of the Sabbath" in Ethiopia is given by Hammerschmidt (1963).

117 It was never exclusively an inner problem, as the Abunas from Alexandria brought foreign elements into the country, too. However, it stayed within the borders of oriental Christianity.

Another issue in understanding the ways in which Jewish identity is represented in pre-modern Ethiopian sources is the question of Solomonic descent. The adverse associations with non-Solomonic origins cast the Zagʷe, who were just as non-Solomonic as the Beta Israel (at least in the eyes of those who considered themselves part of this "elite" lineage), in a prejudicial light—which was one of the reasons for the shaping of the *Kəbrä Nägäśt*. For the Zagʷe, their non-Solomonic origin was equated with an illegitimate claim to the throne by members of the Solomonic dynasty (Kaplan 1992, 48). The Hebraic elements, such as the Saturday Sabbath—within the doctrine of the Church, however—where cherished, or defeated when necessary.

Polemic nomenclature was used to fabricate a Jewish identity where there was none by a ruling group to taint a minority. "From these vague traditions in which truth and fiction are inextricably jumbled together, the inquirer does not gain much trustworthy information on the history of Ethiopia, and the settlement of the Jews in that country" (Stern 1862, 185). The place of the Beta Israel, as found in the sources, is that of one of the heretic groups of pre-modern Ethiopia, struggling against doctrinal changes imposed on them by fanatic Christian rulers.

Heretic groups, deemed "evil" by the ruling elite, were associated with Judaism, although they themselves would never have identified with Jewish belief. Also, even though Abba Sabra and Ṣägga Amlak are holy to the Beta Israel and can be recognized in some of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's references to "*Ayhud*", this does not imply that the Beta Israel thought of themselves as Jews. Unfortunately, no written documents which would reveal the perspective of the Beta Israel in the past have been uncovered as of yet. Since the eighteenth century, we possess accounts of Western travellers who already clearly called the Beta Israel "Jews", but as late as the early twentieth century, this was not a term used by the Beta Israel themselves.

From a scholarly point of view, the Jewishness of the Beta Israel is repeatedly debated, too. It is often stated that Beta Israel's literary corpus consists only of the Books of the Bible and de-Christianized, non-canonical writings (such as *Ardə'ət*, the *Testaments of the Three Patriarchs*, etc., Brakmann 1994, 47). This claim may be true; however, it is also true that the Beta Israel erased all Christian traces from these texts in a deliberate act.[118] Moreover, they draw clear lines between their Christian and Muslim neighbours, keeping their own strict purity laws in order not to commit any sin or defile their beliefs.

Despite the many decades of research, there are still several elements of Beta Israel culture which deserve deeper study, such as their monastic movement (see Krebs and Kribus in this volume), their settlements in the Semien mountains, and their manuscript tradition and literary corpus, both written and oral. Such comprehensive research would provide the basis on which to elaborate a proper methodology, apply theories of otherness, and engage in socio-linguistic studies in the Ethiopian context.

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118 Martin Heide, who edited the *Testamente Isaaks und Jakobs* as well as the *Testament of Abraham*, all three of which were venerated by the Beta Israel, gives a few examples of the translation and adaptation praxis the Beta Israel scribes applied. Given the philological rule by Karl Lachman that even younger manuscripts may carry the oldest text, Heide included the Beta Israel texts in his edition focussing on the Christian text (Heide 2012, 27). In general, the Trinitarian Formula of the Christian texts is replaced by the Beta Israel Formula (ይትባርክ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አምላክ፡ እስራኤል፡, "Praised be God, the Lord of Israel"); furthermore, references to Christian church fathers are rendered or omitted (Heide, 2012, 50–51). However, there are many cases where this adaptation process was not performed thoroughly, and references such as to Jesus Christ and others survive in the Beta Israel texts (Leslau 1951, 9, "and Enoch will be there until the Saviour comes"). In particular, quotes from biblical texts can be found in Beta Israel literature; see Leslau's list of "scriptural references", which includes several New Testament quotes (Leslau 1951, 196–197).

Annex 1

The fifteenth-century monk Ǝsṭifanos started a monastic movement, the Stephanites, which suffered from great tribulations of the normative church under king Zärʾa Yaʿəqob. The king "demanded from the faithful that they prostrate themselves to the ground whenever three names are mentioned: Jesus, Mary, and Zärʾa Yaʿəqob" (Getatchew Haile 1992, 2), which the Stephanites refused to do (Getatchew Haile 1983c, 96).[119] Ǝsṭifanos was summoned on several occasions; during one of these, the following dialog is supposed to have occured. The discussion centres around the word "Israelite"; the implication of Ǝsṭifanos is that an Ethiopian could not refer to himself as an Israelite, and that, moreover, this designation is inferior to that of being a Christian:

> ወይቤሎ፡ ዝኩ፡ ሰዓጢ፡ አንተሰኬ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢታአምር። ወይቤ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አአምር፡ ንጉሠ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ በጽድቅ፡ ይዕቀብ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ መንግሥቶ። ወይቤ፡ ዝኩ፡ ጎሣሢ፡ ምክንያት፡ አንሰ፡ እብሎ፡ እስራኤል። ወይቤ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወአንሰ፡ እብሎ፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ወተስእሎ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ለዝክቱ፡ ብእሲ፡ ወይቤሎ፡ ንግረኒ፡ እስኩ፡ ሶበ፡ እብል፡ ክርስቲያናዊ፡ ዘትብል፡ እስራኤላዊ፡ ስም፡ እስራኤልኑ፡ የዐቢ፡ ወሚመ፡ ስም፡ ክርስቲና። ወይቤ፡ ዝኩ፡ ስሑት፡ ስም፡ እስራኤል፡ የዐቢ። ወአውሥአ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወይቤ፡ አልቦ፡ ስም፡ ክርስቲና፡ የዐቢ። ወእስራኤልሰ፡ ተወሊዶሙ፡ በሥጋ፡ ይሰመዩ፡ እስራኤል። ወስም፡ ክርስቲናሰ፡ ተወሊዶሙ፡ በልደት፡ ሰማያዊት፡ በመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ይሰመዩ፡ ክርስቲያን። ወበእንተዝ፡ ትትሌዐል፡ ስም፡ ቅድስት፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ እንተ፡ ላዕለ፡ ኵሉ፡ ጉባኤ፡ ዘሐዋርያት። (Getatchew Haile 2006, 34–35)

That deceiver [the saint's prosecutor] said to him, "But you do not recognize even the king." The saint said, "I do recognize the king of the

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Christians; he is a Christian in truth. May God preserve his kingdom." That seeker of a pretext [his prosecutor] said, "I call him Israel." The saint said, "I call him Christian". The saint asked that man, saying, "Now, tell me, seeing that you say 'Israelite,' when I say 'Christian,' is the name of Israel or the name of Christianity greater?" That misguided one said, "The name of Israel is greater." The saint answered, saying, "No, the name of Christianity is greater. Israelites are called Israel being born of flesh. As for the name of Christianity, they are called Christians being born by a heavenly birth by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the name of the holy catholic apostolic Church is greater." (Getatchew Haile 2006, 30)[120]

Annex 2

The *Miracles of Mary* are to be read during the daily services, on every Sunday, and in addition on each of her thirty-two yearly feast days.[121] On some occasions, the readings may be preceded by "The Address which is to be read by the Reader of the Miracles of the blessed Virgin Mary to the Congregation in Church". This text starts with blessings and praise of Mary, in the middle section it curses and "warns" Jews, and it ends again with praising and venerating lines towards Mary. This is the middle section:

አይሁድ፡ ምዝቡራን፡ ስሙ፡ መሪራን፡ ለኃዲር፡ ይረዱ፡ ታሕተ፡ ዕመቀ፡ ደይን፡ አሜን።

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[120] The translation of the last sentence is a bit far from the Gəʽəz text, which should rather be translated: "Therefore, the name of the holy Church is superior to the apostolic assembly," meaning the church as an institution is above earthly matters but shaped, or supported, by the apostolic assembly.

[121] Budge (1923, xlvii–xlviii) provides a list of these days.

አይሁድ፡ እኩያን፡ ሰመ፡ ዚአኪ፡ እለ፡ ኢይፈቅዱ፡ ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ይክህዱ፡ በሰይፈ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ይትዓፀዱ፡ በሥቃየ፡ እሳት፡ ይንድዱ፡ ታሕተ፡ ዕመቀ፡ ደይን፡ ለጐዲር፡ ይረዱ፡ አሜን።

አይሁድ፡ ሐሳውያን፡ ድንግናኪ፡ እለ፡ ያሰቄሩ፡ በሰናስለ፡ እሳት፡ ይትዓሠሩ፡ ታሕተ፡ ደይን፡ ወፀዐ፡ ይንበሩ፡ አሜን።

አይሁድ፡ ዓማፅያን፡ ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ይረግሙ፡ በሰይፈ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ይትግዘሙ፡ በሥቃየ፡ እሳት፡ ይሕምሙ፡ ታሕተ፡ ደይን፡ ዘአልቦ፡ ሙፃዕ፡ ይትሐተሙ፡ አሜን።

አይሁድ፡ ዝልጉሳን፡ ወጽዮን፡ ድንግልናኪ፡ እለ፡ ይፀርፉ፡ በእደ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ይትቀሰፉ፡ ገሀነመ፡ እሳት፡ ይትዓፀፉ፡ ታሕተ፡ ደይን፡ ይትወ ረዉ፡ ወይዕደፉ፡ አሜን። (Budge 1900, 6)

"May the Jews, who are doomed to perdition, whose name stirrth up wrath, go down and have their habitation in the lowest depths of the place of judgment. Amen!

May the wicked Jews who will [hear] thy name and who deny thy virginity be mown down by the sword of Michael, may they be burnt in the torment of fire, and may they go down and have their habitation in the lowest depths of the place of judgment. Amen!

May the lying Jews who hold thy virginity in abhorrence be fettered and bound in chains of fire; and may they dwell [in the lowermost depths] of the place of judgment and destruction! Amen.

May the evil-doing Jews who curse thy virginity be cut down by the sword of Michael, may they suffer pains in the torture of the fire, and may they be shut in down in the depths of the place of judgment whence there is no escape. Amen.

May the leprous and filthy Jews who blaspheme thy virginity be punished by the hand of Michael, may they become involved deeper and deeper in the Gehenna of fire, and may they be hurled down headlong and cast into the depths of the place of judgement! Amen. (Budge 1923, lv–lvi)

Annex 3

"Converting the Jews of Enfraz"

Translated summary of Conti Rossini 1937/1939, 445–447.

Our father Gäbra Iyäsus went out on a long trip, traveling only with his dog as his loyal companion. When our father retreated into solitude to spend his days in prayer, his dog was the one taking care of him; he brought food to his master from a remote monastery, which the monks there had bound on his back.

One day, on his way to his master, the dog encountered two Jews herding cattle. These Jews were from that tribe of Jews that had fled the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus and had migrated to Ethiopia. Now, when the Jews saw the dog with the food on his back, they desired to take it from him. The dog tried to escape, but in doing so the food fell off his back into a river.

The dog was ashamed to disappoint his master and did not dare to return to him. Rather, he was hiding in nearby huts. The leader of the Jews, Zena Gabo, found the dog and wanted to take care of him. He provided the dog

with milk and bread thinking he would appreciate the food, however, the dog refused to touch any of it. Zena Gabo went to our father Gäbrä Iyäsus asking for an explanation. The saint told him, the dog would not eat the food of humans, as dogs only eat human excrements and drink turbid water. Also, the dog was full of hate and disgust towards the Jews, who deny the true faith, who have a heart of stone, and who would 'take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs' (Mk 7:27). Thus, it shows how the Jews have become like the dogs, and the dogs have become like the sons of God.

Zena Gabo was surprised and asked our father again, "Why will he not take the food?". Our father replied, "How can he accept your food when you have no religion?" Zena Gabo inquired, "But is my religions inferior to that of the dog?", which Gäbrä Iyäsus confirmed, stating, "Yes, your religion is worse than that of the dog, the dog's religion is superior to yours!" And through these words Zena Gabo was convinced that the Christian faith was superior to Judaism, he asked our father Gäbrä Iyäsus to baptize him in the name of the Holy Father.

Also he asked the saint to heal his daughter, who was possessed by a snake demon in her stomach. Gäbrä Iyäsus successfully cast the snake from the girl and she received baptism like her father. After this, their entire group converted to Christianity, filling our father Gäbrä Iyäsus with joy and happiness.

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Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jewish) Monastic Sites North of Lake Tana

Preliminary Results of an Exploratory Field Trip to Ethiopia in December 2015

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ABSTRACT   This paper presents results of the first field trip aimed at locating and studying the remains of Beta Israel[1] (Ethiopian Jewish) monasteries, as part of an ongoing research project aimed at shedding light on Beta Israel monasticism. Prior to this field trip, no Beta Israel monastery had ever been mapped, and no study focused on these monasteries has ever been conducted. On the trip, two former Beta Israel villages north of Lake Tana were examined: Amba Gʷalit and Aṭeyä. At Amba Gʷalit, the remains of a Beta Israel holy site, which may have been a monastery containing a synagogue and surrounded by an enclosure wall, were documented. In a nearby Beta Israel cemetery, the tomb of a well-known Beta Israel monk was found. At Aṭeyä, remains of well-preserved Beta Israel dwellings were examined. Both sites demonstrated that Beta Israel material culture in Ethiopia is sufficiently preserved to enable further research aimed at locating and examining Beta Israel monasteries.

KEY WORDS   Ethiopian Jews; Beta Israel; Falasha; monasticism; monasteries; Lake Tana; Gonder

Introduction: Beta Israel Monasticism

The Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jewish) monastic movement is the only Jewish or Judaic monastic movement known to have existed in medieval or

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1   In this article, the transliteration system of the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica for Amharic and Geʿez terms is followed; for personal names, the individual's preferred transliteration is given. However, for the sake of simplicity the common spelling "Beta Israel" will be used rather than the correct spelling "Betä Ǝsraʾel".

modern times. Beta Israel monks, similarly to their Ethiopian Orthodox[2] counterparts, devoted their lives to the worship of God and practiced celibacy and asceticism, withdrawing, to an extent, from lay society and residing in monasteries (Kribus, forthcoming a). Unlike their Ethiopian Orthodox counterparts, Beta Israel monks served, by virtue of their monastic initiation, as the highest-ranking Beta Israel clergymen. They were charged with training and consecrating the lay clergy, and—if they resided in the vicinity of lay communities—with leading the liturgy attended by these communities (Flad 1869, 35; Shelemay 1989, 78–88, 104–109). Following the loss of Beta Israel autonomy and the demise of the Beta Israel political leadership as a result of conflict with the Christian Solomonic kingdom from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century (Kaplan 1992, 79–96; Quirin 1992, 52–62, 72–86), the monks assumed the role of leaders of the Beta Israel in political matters as well (Kaplan 1992, 69–73).

Documented examples of the impact of Beta Israel monastic leadership on the lay community are numerous. Beta Israel monks enacted religious revivals (Leslau 1947, 80–81), fervently opposed the efforts of Christian missionaries to convert the Beta Israel to Christianity, and imposed sanctions on converts (Ben-Dor 1994, 74–82). They represented the community in attempts to establish contact with Jewish communities outside of Ethiopia (Waldman 1989, 109–116, 125–128, 184–185). In 1862, Abba Mähäri, a high-ranking Beta Israel monk, led an unsuccessful exodus aimed at reaching Jerusalem (Ben-Dor 1987).

Beta Israel oral tradition attributes the foundation of this monastic movement to the fifteenth-century monk Abba Sabra. One version of this oral tradition views Abba Sabra as a member of the Beta Israel community,

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2   The term "Ethiopian Orthodox" will be used to refer to the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwaḥədo Church, the national church of Ethiopia.

who decided to withdraw from the world due to the calamities which befell his community. A second version sees him as a Christian who, impressed by the religious devotion of the Beta Israel, decided to join their community (Ben-Dor 1985, 41–45). Ethiopian Orthodox hagiographies of Christian monks mention interactions with groups which have been identified with the Beta Israel or their predecessors, and, in one case, speak of a monk explicitly joining such a group (Conti Rossini 1919–20, 567–577; Kaplan 1983). Coupled with the similarity between Ethiopian Orthodox and Beta Israel monastic practices (Shelemay 1989) and the above-mentioned oral tradition on Abba Sabra, scholars have attributed a Christian origin to Beta Israel monasticism (Kaplan 1992, 69–73; Quirin 1992, 66–68; Shelemay 1989, 81–83). The Beta Israel community, on the other hand, sees this monastic movement as an internal Beta Israel development.[3]

Beta Israel monasticism drastically declined during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Reasons for this decline include famine (1888–1892, see Kaplan 1990a; 1992, 143–154), armed conflict, and political unrest (see, for example, Erlich 2007). These calamities drastically reduced the population in the northern Ethiopian Highlands, including the areas inhabited by the Beta Israel. In addition, Christian missionaries active among the Beta Israel from the mid-nineteenth century criticized this monastic movement and its representatives (Kaplan 1987; 1992, 116–142). And, finally, efforts made by representatives of World Jewry to encourage the Beta Israel to adhere to Orthodox (Rabbinical)

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3   The Beta Israel tradition attributing a Christian origin to Abba Sabra was narrated by Yona Boggalä and Tä'ammərat Amanu'el (Ben-Dor 1985, 42; Leslau 1974, 624–626). During the course of interviews with the religious leadership of the Beta Israel community, conducted in the years 2014 to 2017 as part of research on Beta Israel monasticism, the results of which are still being processed, it has become clear to the present authors that the tradition attributing a Christian origin to Abba Sabra is virtually unknown within present-day Beta Israel society.

religious laws at the expense of their traditional religious practices (see, for example, Trevisan-Semi 2007) led to a partial abandonment of traditions with no Rabbinical Jewish parallel. Only one practicing Beta Israel monk immigrated to Israel (Odenheimer 2005; Tourny 2002), and only one of his students is currently pursuing a monastic life.

While Beta Israel monasticism thus no longer exists as a widespread phenomenon, numerous sources shed light on its history and characteristics. These include late nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of encounters with Beta Israel monks, written by scholars (see, for example, d'Abbadie 1851; Leslau 1951, xxi–xxvii), missionaries (see, for example, Payne 1972, 21, 85; Stern 1968, 195–197, 207–208, 244, 248–253, 259–260, 279–280, 282–283, 295), and representatives of World Jewry (see, for example, Faitlovitch 1959, 69, 79–81; Halévy 1994, 43–45, 50) active among the Beta Israel. There are also texts written or edited by the Beta Israel community religious rather than historiographic in nature.[4] The Beta Israel oral tradition as well as the personal experiences of the elders of the community and its religious leaders, many of which have met with Beta Israel monks in the past, is of paramount importance to the study of this monastic movement.

Numerous studies dealing with the Beta Israel have been conducted (Kaplan and Ben-Dor 1988; Salamon and Kaplan 1998), but relatively few deal with Beta Israel life prior to the twentieth century, and even fewer

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4   Modern scholarship has recognized the role of Beta Israel monks in the composition and editing of Beta Israel religious texts (Kaplan 1990b; 1992, 73–77). The Beta Israel oral tradition attributes the composition of several Beta Israel prayers to these monks (Halévy 1994, 45; Kaplan 1992, 72–73). Therefore, such texts can potentially shed light on Beta Israel monasticism.
     Only one known account of Beta Israel history written by a member of the Beta Israel community could possibly predate the twentieth century (Leslau 1947). A number of historiographical accounts dealing, in part, with Beta Israel monasticism have been written down by members of this community in recent years (Asres Yayeh 1995; Gobäze Barok 2007; Ḫädanä Täqoyä 2011).

with Beta Israel monasticism. The latter include the monumental works of Kaplan (1992), Shelemay (1978; 1989), and Quirin (1979; 1992). These focus primarily on the Ethiopian context of Beta Israel monasticism, and on the religious and leadership roles of the monks. A number of studies, such as those conducted by Ben-Dor (1985; 1987), Leslau (1951), and Täʾammərat Amanuʾel (published by Leslau, 1974), shed light on the acts of individual monks and on the location and layout of specific monasteries. The material culture[5] associated with Beta Israel monasticism, the location and layout of Beta Israel monasteries, and the physical, concrete aspects of the lives of the monks (with the exception of their role in liturgy performance) have, however, not been comprehensively studied before. In fact, only one archaeological study of Beta Israel material culture has ever been published (Klein 2007), and this study does not deal with monasticism. In December 2015, a team working under the auspices of the European Research Council project "Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean" (JewsEast), based out of Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany, conducted a first mission towards this purpose.[6] This article will present some of its results. It will hopefully be the first of a number of field seasons conducted as part of research focusing on the material culture and physical lives of Beta Israel monks.

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5   This term is used to refer to objects made or utilized by people with the understanding that assemblages of such objects are indicative of and comprise part of the culture of the people who made use of them. In the context of this article, it is used to refer to structures and items used in domestic and religious settings.

6   The field season was headed by Dr. Verena Krebs of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and based on preliminary research conducted by Bar Kribus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Permission to conduct fieldwork in Ethiopia was granted by the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Semira Mohammed of Addis Ababa University served as interpreter and conducted many of the interviews. Ismail Ibrahim served as driver. Chen Zeigen prepared some of the maps used to plan the fieldwork. Abebe Asfaw Tadege translated a number of interview recordings.

Locating the Beta Israel Monasteries North of Lake Tana

The material culture of the Beta Israel in general and of their monastic movement in particular is a virtually untapped source with the potential of shedding significant light on Beta Israel monastic practices.[7] As the location of Beta Israel monasteries as well as that of the majority of the villages inhabited by the Beta Israel have not been documented in a manner that enables precise identification, the attempt to study Beta Israel material culture in Ethiopia must begin with pinpointing the locations of the above-mentioned sites.[8]

The Beta Israel traditionally resided in the Northern Ethiopian Highlands in an area extending from the lowlands west of Lake Tana through the regions north of this lake and the Səmen Mountains to the vicinity of the town of Aksum in Təgray (fig. 1). Beta Israel monasteries existed in virtually all regions inhabited by the Beta Israel, with the possible exception of Təgray province[9] and provinces in which the Beta Israel settled in modern times, such as Lasta and Goǧǧam.

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7   For recently published examples of the use of material culture to shed light on various societies and groups, see Insoll 2015; Wynne-Jones 2016.

8   Only one systematic effort to map the location of villages inhabited by the Beta Israel is currently known—the World ORT census which was carried out in 1976. Unfortunately, the map compiled as part of this survey is schematic and devoid of topographic features. No Beta Israel monastery location had ever been pinpointed with precision on a map prior to the 2015 field season.

9   In an informal conversation with a Beta Israel priest from Təgray, which took place in Jerusalem on the 31st of October 2013, the priest was asked whether he knew of Beta Israel monasteries in Təgray. His response was that there were no such monasteries in that region. Rather, individuals from Təgray who wished to be trained as priests would travel to monasteries in the Səmen Mountains and receive their training there. Two documented examples of this phenomenon have been identified by the present writers: Qes Käśate Mənase (interviewed 31 March 2016) served as a priest in Wälqayt, a region neighboring
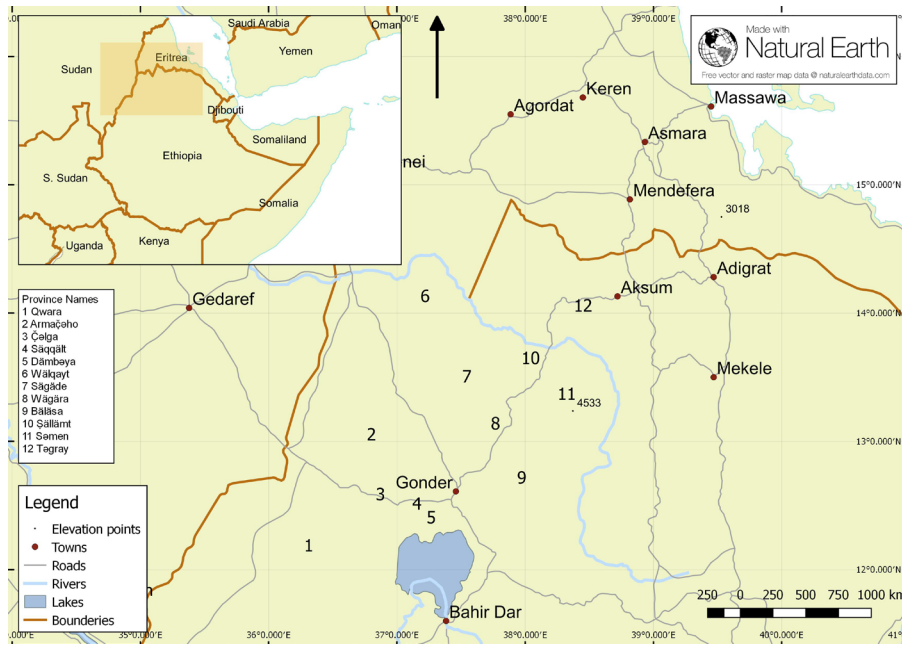
FIGURE 1   Areas inhabited by the Beta Israel in pre-modern times.
Made with Natural Earth (Free vector and raster map data
@ naturalearthdata.com)

Beta Israel monasteries were typically composed of a number of huts serving as dwellings for the monks, similar in form to the typical rural dwellings (*goǧo*) of the region in which they were situated; a prayer-house (*mäsgid*)[10] which, in some cases, served both the monks and the lay community residing near the monastery; and an enclosure wall or fence, delimiting the monastery and enabling the monks to maintain ritual purity within it. These monasteries were typically situated in the immediate vicinity of villages inhabited by the Beta Israel or, less commonly, within a

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Təgray. He received his training in the monastery of Səmen Mänaṭa, located in the Səmen Mountains (fig. 2). *Mämhər* Yəsḥaq Iyasu from Təgray studied in the same monastery (Ben-Dor 1985, 33).

10   The term *mäsgid* is derived from the Geʿez root SGD, which means "to bow" or "to worship by prostration".

distance that would still enable frequent contact with the laity.[11] Eyewitness accounts of visits to Beta Israel monasteries often name the village in the vicinity of which the monastery was located (see, for example, Faitlovtich 1959, 69; Leslau 1951, xxv–xxvi). Therefore, the first, crucial step in locating the remains of the monasteries is locating these villages.

An examination of written accounts of visits to Beta Israel monasteries and of information regarding such monasteries narrated by members of the Beta Israel community, conducted prior to the 2015 field season, revealed information regarding the location of fifteen distinct places in which Beta Israel monks resided.[12] Of these, eleven are explicitly described as either monasteries or dwelling places of several monks. Whether the remaining sites were monasteries in the full sense of the term or rather dwelling places of individual monks remains to be determined. An examination of historical and modern maps led to the identification of localities bearing names identical or nearly identical to those of the villages in which seven of the monastic sites were situated, and located in the same regions as these villages (fig. 2).[13] Hence, it is likely that the monastic sites were located in these localities or in their immediate vicinity.

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11   For a discussion regarding the characteristics of Beta Israel monasteries, see Kribus forthcoming a. All documented information regarding Beta Israel monasteries appears in written sources which date to the second half of the nineteenth century or later and in oral accounts narrated during the second half of the twentieth century or later (see above). This information thus sheds light on Beta Israel monasticism as it existed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It may be that, prior to this time, some of the characteristics of these monasteries were different. However, addressing this issue requires further research.

12   A discussion regarding all 15 sites and the sources dealing with them is beyond the scope of this paper, and will be held in future publications. (For examples of such sources, see Faitlovitch 1959, 69, 79–81; Halévy 1994, 44–45; Leslau 1951, xxii–xxvi).

13   Information regarding the precise location of three additional monastic sites, Teyber, Doro Wǝḫa and Sǝmen Mänaṭa, obtained and examined following the 2015 season, has enabled
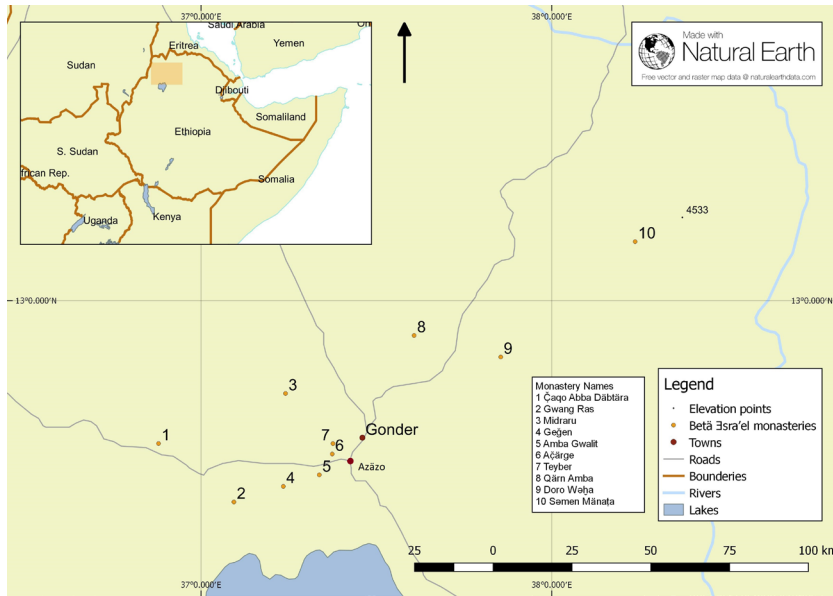
FIGURE 2   Estimated location of Beta Israel monasteries. Made
with Natural Earth (Free vector and raster map data @
naturalearthdata.com)

Seven of the sites explicitly identified as monasteries are located in areas
easily accessible from the Azäzo-Č̣əlga road, not far from the central
town of Gonder: Ačärge, Zär'a Wärq, Amba Gʷalit, Goraba, Gʷang Ras, and
Mədraru in the Säqqält region, and Č̣aqo Abba Däbtära in the neighboring
Č̣əlga region. Place-names identical to those of all but two of these sites,
Zär'a Wärq and Goraba, have been identified on the maps examined.
Due to the relatively large concentration of sites in a well-defined area

us to pinpoint their estimated location on the map. Thus, ten (rather than seven) sites
appear on the map.

easily accessible from a main town and the relative wealth of information regarding these sites, it was decided that the regions of Säqqält and Č̣əlga would be an ideal focal point for fieldwork aimed at locating and studying Beta Israel monasteries.

The 2015 season was, first and foremost, a preparatory season aimed at laying the groundwork for future fieldwork. Hence, the amount of time which could be devoted to fieldwork was relatively limited. The outbreak of hostilities between different groups residing in the Č̣əlga region, which coincided with this season, severely limited the possibility of travel to the monastic sites: the Azäzo-Č̣əlga road was completely closed off at Azäzo, and numerous individuals informed us that travel throughout Säqqält was not safe. Looking into Beta Israel monasteries in other regions was not
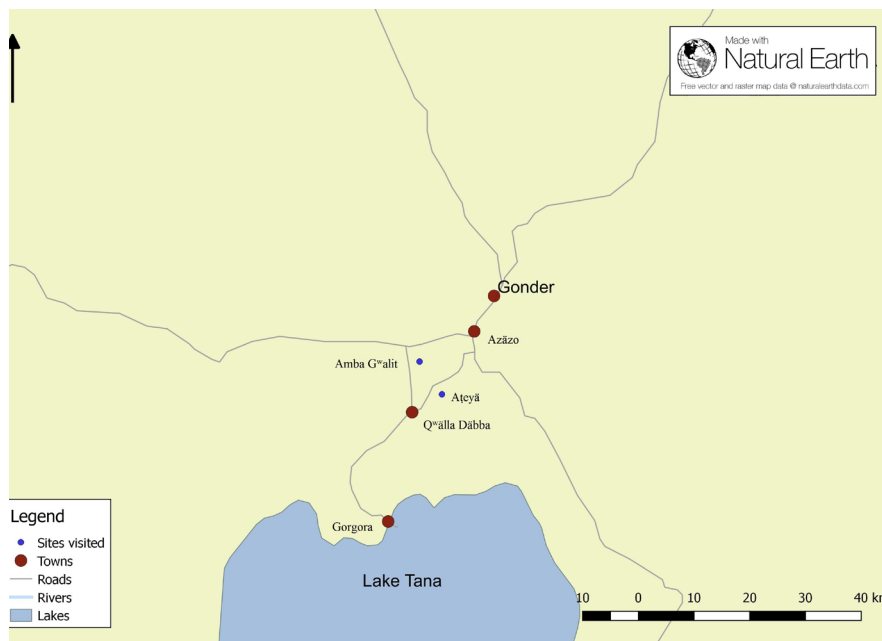
FIGURE 3   Location of Amba Gʷalit and Aṭeyä. Made with Natural Earth (Free vector and raster map data @ naturalearthdata.com)

feasible at the time for a variety of logistical and security-related reasons.

The remaining option was attempting to reach relevant sites from the one main road in the vicinity of Säqqält which remained open—the Azäzo-Gorgora road (fig. 3). Information obtained in Gonder indicated that the village of Amba Gʷalit, the possible location of a Beta Israel monastery, was accessible from this road and relatively safe. The location of an additional monastic site, Ačärge, was unknown at the time, but in one of the maps examined,[14] a village by the name of "Adi Cirgie" appeared in the vicinity of this road. It was surmised, due to the similarity of the two names, that the village of "Adi Cirgie" and the village of Ačärge may be one and the same.[15] Therefore, we decided to attempt to reach both sites.

The aim of visiting the sites was to try and obtain information regarding the exact location of the Beta Israel monasteries within them, identify the monastery remains and additional elements of Beta Israel material culture in general, and determine the feasibility of more detailed research at the sites in the future. Collection of potential archaeological finds or detailed mapping were not possible, as these would have required additional permits. Structures and structure remains observed during fieldwork were later identified on satellite images, enabling the documentation of their exact location and general layout (see below).

Plans for future fieldwork include a preliminary survey aimed at identifying additional Beta Israel monastic sites, followed by a detailed survey of key sites. The information gathered, complemented by information obtained from the Beta Israel community and from people living in the vicinity of the monastic sites, will enable a better understanding of the

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14   Great Britain. War Office. General Staff. Geographical Section. *East Africa 1:500,000.* Map. London: War Office, 1947.

15   It was only following the 2015 field season that the village of Ačärge was located by us on the ORT 1976 census map (see above) north of the Azäzo-Čəlga road, hence disproving this identification.

layout and characteristics of Beta Israel monasteries and the way of life of Beta Israel monks. It is hoped that a comparison between finds examined in monastic sites and those typical of non-monastic contexts will enable a better understanding of the characteristics of Beta Israel monastic material culture. In addition, a comparison of finds from Beta Israel monastic sites with finds uncovered in datable archaeological contexts could potentially enable the dating of different monastic sites and further an understanding of their development over time. Therefore, the examination of non-monastic Beta Israel material culture as preserved in Ethiopia was deemed a secondary objective of the field trip and will serve, in addition to monastic material culture from non-Beta Israel contexts, as a framework within which the examination of Beta Israel monastic material culture can be examined.

This fieldwork was of paramount importance in determining the viability of future research on Beta Israel material culture: the typical rural dwellings of the north-western Ethiopian Highlands are largely built of perishable, organic materials. All significant Beta Israel communities had immigrated to Israel during the second half of the twentieth century; it was thus unclear to what extent identifiable remains of their material culture had remained *in situ* and to what extent the non-Beta Israel inhabitants of the region would welcome such research and volunteer information on the Beta Israel. Additionally, due to the similarity between the dwellings of Beta Israel monks and dwellings of the laity, it was unclear whether it would be possible to differentiate between such dwellings in the sites examined. This is further complicated by the fact that Beta Israel monasteries were typically located within or near villages, adjacent to dwellings of laymen. During the 2015 field season, it was conclusively proven that these potential difficulties could be overcome, as will be demonstrated below.

Each of the two sites visited will be treated separately. An overview of the reasons leading to our selection of the site will be followed by a general

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description of its geographical setting and sub-sections describing the different features examined within it.

Textual Sources Hinting at a Possible Beta Israel Monastery at Amba Gʷalit

The study of textual sources, such as travel accounts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has proven invaluable in the attempt to pinpoint the location of Beta Israel monasteries and examine their characteristics. In 1897, Ethiopian missionaries, employed by the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, journeyed to a number of villages inhabited by the Beta Israel in Säqqält and wrote an account of their journey (Wandem Huning Negoosie 1898). Regarding their visit to Amba Gʷalit, they wrote:

> After a day's march we reached Amba Qualit, the large village of the High Priest; inhabited only by Falasha [Beta Israel] priests. There are no females, as all priests are unmarried. Having passed the night at a Christian village, two hours' distance, the next day, their Sabbath, we made our appearance, after they had finished with their synagogue ceremonies.

This description would indicate that a Beta Israel monastery had existed in Amba Gʷalit at the time: prior to initiation as priests, Beta Israel novices would commonly receive their training from the monks at a monastery.[16]

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16   During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due do the decline of the Beta Israel monastic movement, Beta Israel priests gradually assumed the roles of the monks as trainers and consecrators of the clergy.

Following the successful completion of their training, they could either choose to marry and become priests, or to remain celibate and become monks. Marriage was thus one of the conditions of initiation into the priesthood (Kribus, forthcoming b). Beta Israel monks were often referred to as priests, and monastic leaders as high priests (Faitlovitch 1959, 69, 79–81, 90; Flad 1869, 32; Stern 1968, 249). Therefore, it would seem that the above-mentioned description, which refers to a high priest as well as a place inhabited only by priests, and to these priests being unmarried, would indeed actually refer to a monastery.

The Jewish emissary Jacques Faitlovitch (1959, 67–75, 83–85, 87–89) resided in the village of Amba Gʷalit for three months in 1908 and wrote extensively about his stay there. He does not mention a monastic community, but rather twenty-three Beta Israel families, and writes: "The community has a large *mäsgid*, famous for its religious scholars, the *däbtära*."[17] In contrast, he describes a Beta Israel monastery in the nearby village of Goraba (Faitlovitch 1959, 69).[18] Elsewhere, Faitlovitch (1959, 32, 72) mentions *däbtära* Baroḵ as the priest and head of the *mäsgid* in Amba Gʷalit. This priest is one of the most prestigious Beta Israel religious leaders of recent generations, Abba Baroḵ Adhənän (Gobäze Baroḵ 2007, 15).

The Baroḵ family is well-known within the Beta Israel community. Several religious leaders came from its ranks. Abba Baroḵ Adhənän, who may be considered the founding father of this dynasty of religious leaders, was a native of Amba Gʷalit. His descendants recount that he lived as a

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17   Faitlovitch 1959, 67. The Geʻez term *däbtära* refers to a tabernacle or tent and is derived from the Greek *διφθἐρα* (leather used as a tent). The term is also used to refer to unconsecrated religious scholars and cantors, often also renowned for their skill as healers and scribes. The position of *däbtära* exists both in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and among the Beta Israel (Kaplan 2005; Shelemay 1992).

18   We had hoped to be able to visit Goraba during the field trip, but were informed that the security situation did not enable this.

hermit in the wilderness for forty years, until he was instructed in a dream to renounce the monastic life, return to his home village, marry, have children, and serve as a priest. After the third occurrence of this vision, he reluctantly acted as he was instructed. A number of his grandsons and great-grandsons currently serve as priests in Israel (Gobäze Baroḵ 2007, 5–6).

Faitlovitch's description therefore indicates that during the time of his visit, a monastery did not exist in Amba Gʷalit, but the village's place of worship was prestigious and its clergy renowned and affiliated with Beta Israel monks.[19] Assuming the missionaries' description, predating Faitlovich by eleven years, is indicative of a monastery, it remains to be determined when exactly and why this monastery ceased to be active.

The Evidence from Amba Gʷalit

We arrived in Amba Gʷalit on December 12, 2015. Upon arriving, we were greeted by a number of the village's inhabitants,[20] who informed us that

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19   In his book, Qes Gobäze Baroḵ (2007, 5) mentions a monk by the name of Abba Aräyane who served as the teacher and mentor of Abba Baroḵ Adhənän. Faitlovitch (1959, 69), in his account of his visit to the monastery at Goraba, remarks that a monk by the name of Abba Aryen was the head of the community. The similarity of the name and proximity of Goraba to Amba Gʷalit may indicate that the head of the monastery and Abba Baroḵ's mentor were one and the same. This suggestion is given further weight by the account of Qes Ḥädanä Täqoyä (2011, 124), who states that a monk by the name of Abba Aräyane, who was from the region of Armačǝho, was one of the monks who met with Faitlovitch at Goraba.

20   The dynamics of our interaction with the inhabitants of Amba Gʷalit during this preliminary visit did not allow for a proper documentation of the names of individual informants or a clear documentation of which of the informants had narrated each portion of information. According to the locals, we were the first research team they encountered and the first group of *färänğ* (Western Foreigners) in a generation's time. Thus, we were

they well remembered the Beta Israel community which formerly resided in the village and kindly offered to show us where they had resided and different features associated with them. We visited the Beta Israel cemetery and prayer-house, both of which are described below.
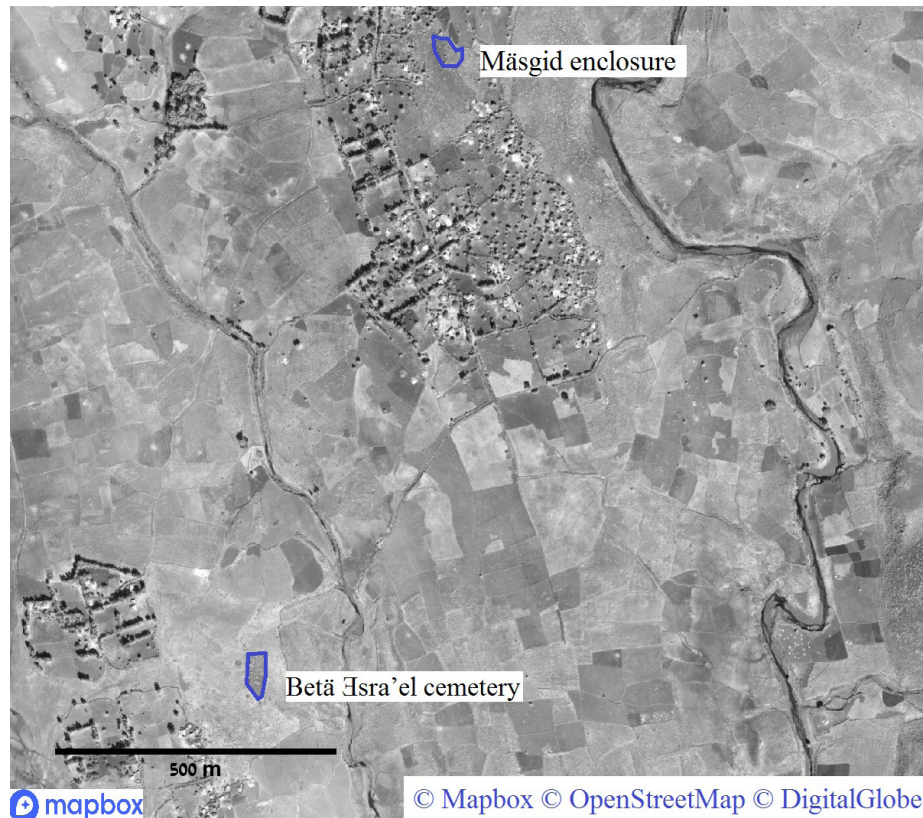

FIGURE 4   Amba Gʷalit, satellite image (© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap © DigitalGlobe)

greeted by numerous people, who accompanied us and volunteered information, with some joining and others departing over the course of our visit. We hope to conduct more thorough ethnographic field work and in-depth interviews with relevant individuals in the near future.

Amba Gʷalit: The Beta Israel Cemetery

The village of Amba Gʷalit is composed of a number of clusters of domestic dwellings, located on hilltops, with numerous homesteads and cultivated fields surrounding them (fig. 4). The Beta Israel cemetery is situated in a valley east of the road leading from Qʷälla Däbba to Amba Gʷalit. It is surrounded by a stone enclosure wall, delimiting a roughly quadrangular area with a maximum extent of 79 meters north to south and 29 meters east to west (fig. 5).[21] No gate leading into the enclosed area was visible. According to ʾAvišai Barok̠ (personal communication), a member of the Beta Israel community and of the Barok̠ family mentioned above, due to the impurity of cemeteries and the emphasis of Beta Israel religious practice on the maintenance of purity, members of this community do not commonly visit burial sites. The walls erected by members of the Beta Israel community around the community's cemeteries in Ethiopia in recent years serve solely to protect and preserve the burials. Thus, no gateway allowing regular access is needed. Our informants recounted that the enclosure wall as well as the tombstones (see below) were erected by members of the Beta Israel community residing in Israel in recent years. The vast majority of burials were marked by heaps of stone, as was the tradition of the Beta Israel prior to the twentieth century. A

FIGURE 5   Beta Israel cemetery, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

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21   In accordance with the permit obtained, no detailed mapping was carried out during this field trip. The measurements presented here are derived from an examination of satellite images on Google Earth.

number of twentieth-century tombstones were identified, featuring the names of the deceased in Amharic, the language of the Beta Israel inhabitants of the region,[22] as well as their year of birth and year of death. Significantly, the tombstone of the renowned Beta Israel religious leader and former monk, Abba Baroḵ Adhənän (see above), was among those identified (fig. 6).

FIGURE 6   Tombstone of Abba Baroḵ Adhənän (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

Amba Gʷalit: The Beta Israel Prayer-House

Identifying the *mäsgid* was of paramount importance in the attempt to locate the remains of the Beta Israel monastery. A *mäsgid*, while not always situated within the enclosure wall delimiting such a monastery, is nevertheless one of its crucial components. In addition, the missionary account which indicated that a monastery had existed in the village (see above) mentioned that the priests, or potentially monks, had just finished service in the synagogue when the missionaries presented themselves to them.

After establishing that our informants at Amba Gʷalit had not heard of a Beta Israel monastery ever having existed in the village (though they were familiar with the Beta Israel monastery at the nearby village of Goraba and mentioned the names of a number of Beta Israel monks), we asked them

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22   In a gradual process which culminated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Amharic, the colloquial language of the Ethiopian Orthodox population of Amhara region, gradually replaced the dialects of Agäw languages spoken by different ethnic and religious groups in this region, including the Beta Israel (Appleyard 2003).

about the village's *mäsgid*. Our informants recounted that this *mäsgid* was a central Beta Israel holy site, and had been a place of pilgrimage for the Beta Israel who had resided in the entire region. They specified that only Beta Israel men were allowed inside and that the locality in which the *mäsgid* was situated was known as Gaǧena.[23] Assuming this information is correct, the sanctity of the site beyond that of a typical *mäsgid,* as well as the prohibition of women from entering it (contrary to common practice regarding Beta Israel houses of prayer, see Flad 1869, 44; Leslau 1951, xxii–xxiii), increases the likelihood that this is indeed the site of a former monastery. Several Beta Israel monasteries founded or inhabited by prestigious monks are known to have been considered holy places by the Beta Israel community and to have served as pilgrimage sites (Ben Dor 1985). Both men and women would conduct pilgrimage to such sites, but there is at least one documented case where separation between them within the holy site is indicated (Faitlovitch 1959, 79).

The *mäsgid* is located on a hilltop to the north-east of the cemetery and is surrounded by an enclosure wall delimiting an area with a maximum

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23   A locality by the name of Geǧen, traditionally one of Abba Sabra's stops on his way from the court of the Solomonic monarch Zär'a Ya'əqob (1434–1468) to Mt. Huhʷara, where he established the first Beta Israel monastery (Ben Dor 1985, 43–44), is described by Tä'ammərat Amanu'el as "the most renowned *masgid* [*mäsgid*]" (Leslau 1974, 636). However, the identification of the site of the Amba Gʷalit *mäsgid* with Geǧen is doubtful, as Geǧen is described as being near Gʷang Ras, the source of the Gʷang river, and a locality bearing that name in the general vicinity of this river appears in a number of topographical maps of the region (see fig. 2). In a list of Beta Israel villages narrated in 1848 to D'Abbadie (1851–1852, 260–262) by Abba Yəshaq, the head monk of the monastery of Huhʷara, and by his disciple Ṣagga Amlak, a locality by the name of Gaǧena is mentioned. Neither Geǧen nor Amba Gʷalit are mentioned in that list. Therefore, while it could very well be that this mention refers to the former, the possibility that it refers to the latter should be taken into account.

extent of 51 meters from north to south and 37 meters from east to west.[24]

FIGURE 7 Foundations of the Beta Israel prayer-house, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

The stone foundations of the circular prayer-house structure—a shape typical for both post-sixteenth century Ethiopian Christian churches as well as Beta Israel *mäsgids*—are six meters in diameter (fig. 7). Rubble and overgrowth made it impossible to discern during our visit whether walls dividing the interior of the *mäsgid* existed. No additional architectural features were visible within the enclosure.

Amba Gʷalit: Blacksmith Tools Affiliated with the Beta Israel

FIGURE 8 Hammers used for blacksmithing, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

In recent generations, the livelihood of members of the Beta Israel community residing in the Gonder area was commonly based on the practice of blacksmithing, weaving, and the manufacture of ceramic vessels (Quirin 1992, 134–137). One of our informants offered to show us objects which had originally belonged to former Beta Israel

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24 It should be noted that several plots on the hilltop on which the *mäsgid* is situated, and, indeed, throughout the village are delimited by enclosure walls. Therefore despite the fact that such a wall was one of the typical characteristics of Beta Israel monasteries, it cannot serve, in this case, as proof of the existence of such a monastery at Amba Gʷalit.

FIGURE 9 Chisels used for blacksmithing, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 10 Tong used for blacksmithing, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 11 Bellows used for blacksmithing, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

inhabitants of the village. These, kept in his home, were blacksmith tools. While it cannot be conclusively proven that these specific items originally belonged to members of the Beta Israel community, it stands to reason that items utilized in the practice of crafts commonly associated with this community would reflect, to some extent, the characteristics of the actual items used by its members.

The tools which we were shown included two metal hammers with wooden handles (*medosha*, fig. 8); two metal chisels with wooden handles (*selet mawuča / mored*, fig. 9); a metal tong (*guṭet*, fig. 10); two bellows comprising a bag made of animal skin, with a nozzle composed of a wooden intermediary tube attached to a metal tube (*wonaf*, fig. 11); and an anvil, composed of a wide metal rod bent to form a convex surface (*neṭaf*, fig. 12).[25] The preservation of such items, as well as the knowledge displayed by our informants regarding their usage, demonstrate that even at present, more than three decades after the beginning of the Beta Israel mass migration to Israel in 1984, information

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25 The Amharic names of the blacksmith tools were related by our informants and transcribed by Abebe Asfaw Tadege, using common spelling by Amharic native speakers, based on a recording of the relevant interview.

FIGURE 12 Anvil used for blacksmithing, Amba Gʷalit (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

on a variety of aspects of Beta Israel life in Ethiopia is retained by this community's former neighbors.

It should be stressed that the above-mentioned tools can be considered indicative of the material culture of the Beta Israel in general, rather than of their monastic movement in particular. As stated above, examining general aspects of Beta Israel material culture as preserved in Ethiopia is an important first step in shedding light on Beta Israel monastic material culture and the difference between it and the material culture of the laity.

Aṭeyä: Evidence of Preserved Beta Israel Material Culture

On December 14, 2015 we attempted to reach the text-documented Beta Israel monastery of Ačärge, which we believed, at the time, to be situated at the locality marked on one of the maps of the region as "Adi Cirgie" (see above). According to the relevant map, this locality is situated in the vicinity of the Azäzo-Gorgora road, and was thus the only targeted site in the vicinity of Gonder other than Amba Gʷalit which we could safely reach. Upon arriving in the vicinity of the relevant area, we asked for directions. The people whom we asked were unfamiliar with a village by the name of "Adi Cirgie" or Ačärge, but, once asked about places inhabited by the Beta Israel, recounted that there was such a village nearby and offered to take us there. Thus, we arrived at the village of Aṭeyä, which was formerly home to a Beta Israel community. As in the case of Amba Gʷalit, the current

inhabitants of the village vividly remembered their Beta Israel neighbors and offered to show us Beta Israel-related sites.

FIGURE 13   Aṭeyä, satellite image (© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap © DigitalGlobe)

The modern village of Aṭeyä is situated at the northern foot of a hill, south of an intensely cultivated plane which is traversed by the Azäzo-Gorgora road (fig. 13). According to our informants, the Beta Israel dwellings had been situated on a terrace south of the present village. And indeed, both the Beta Israel cemetery and the prayer-house remains are situated in the vicinity of that terrace.

Aṭeyä: The Beta Israel Cemetery

The Beta Israel cemetery at Aṭeyä (fig. 14) is, similar to that of Amba Gʷalit, surrounded by an enclosure wall delimiting a roughly quadrangular area measuring 42 meters northwest to southeast and 48 meters northeast to southwest. It is situated south of the present village, on the lowest part of the eastern slope of the above-mentioned hill. As in Amba Gʷalit, it is surrounded by an enclosure wall with no entrance gate. According to our informants, it was built by members of the Beta Israel

FIGURE 14   Beta Israel cemetery, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

community in Israel. The burial sites within the compound were marked with heaps of stones. A number of modern tombstones, similar to those we had seen at the Amba Gʷalit cemetery, had also been erected.

Aṭeyä: Beta Israel Dwellings

FIGURE 15   Foundations of a Beta Israel dwelling, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

Following our visit to the cemetery, we were led by our informants to a wide, natural platform to its north-west. There, a series of stone foundations of circular structures (see fig. 15) were identified by them as remains of Beta Israel dwellings. Further fieldwork is necessary in order to document these remains. At least in the case of Aṭeyä, the existence of such undisturbed foundations contradicts the possible assumption that such dwellings would have been appropriated by the present inhabitants, or their building materials re-used. In actuality, the remains *in situ* enable one to clearly identify the dwellings' locations and dimensions.

Aṭeyä: The Beta Israel Prayer-House

The remains of the structure identified by our informants as the Beta Israel *mäsgid* is located at the top of the hill towering over the village (fig. 16). The complete outline of the structure's wall is impossible to trace on the

surface. However, a rounded corner, from which two walls extend (one to the south and one to the southwest) is visible. Clearly, this structure, unlike other known examples of a Beta Israel *mäsgid*, did not have a circular floor-plan.

FIGURE 16   Remains of Beta Israel *mäsgid*, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

Aṭeyä: Objects Affiliated with the Beta Israel

As in the case of our visit to Amba Gʷalit, our informants in Aṭeyä volunteered to show us objects that had previously been made or used by the Beta Israel. These included blacksmith tools and pottery vessels. The tools (fig. 17) were similar in form to those we had seen at Amba Gʷalit and included a hammer, a chisel, a tong, two bellows (fig. 18), and an anvil. The ceramic vessels included two larger storage jars (*ənsəra*) and two smaller jars. Though the dynamics of our visit did not enable us to take measurements of the vessels, we can provide a detailed description that may assist future scholars studying the history of ceramics in the region, and specifically ceramic types utilized by the Beta Israel community: [26]

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26   For a discussion of ceramic vessels associated with Beta Israel material culture in the Gonder area and a preliminary typology of such vessels, see Klein 2007, 201–277. A comprehensive typology of medieval and modern ceramic types in the Gonder area has not yet been published. Hence, the precise chronology of the types mentioned

FIGURE 17 Demonstration of usage of blacksmithing tools: a metal rod held over an anvil with a tong and struck with a hammer, Aṯeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 18 Bellows used for blacksmithing, Aṯeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

All vessels were potted out of ware ranging in color from reddish-brown to dark purple, and were polished inside and out. The two storage jars were similar to each other in form: both have flaring neck with a simple rim, a globular body and four horizontal loop handles on the shoulder. One jar (fig. 19) features three concentric incised lines below the rim, three concentric bands of appliqué at the base of the neck, and two concentric bands of appliqué on the shoulder, extending between the handles. The other (fig. 20) features a concentric band of appliqué with thumb impressions below the neck and a concentric band of appliqué on the shoulder, extending between the handles. Similar vessels are known to have been used in the Gonder area in modern times (see Klein 2007, figs. 6.1: d, 6.3: b; de Torres 2017, fig. 24). Significantly, vessels nearly identical in form and decoration have been produced by Beta Israel potters in a ceramics workshop in Be'er Sheva, Israel, in recent years (fig. 21).

A third jar (fig. 22) is smaller and features a short neck with a thickened rim, a globular

above is yet unknown. For a study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ceramic types in this area, see de Torres 2017.

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body, and two vertical loop handles on the shoulder. Decoration includes two incised, wavy parallel lines below the neck and two concentric, incised lines extending between the handles. A fourth jar (fig. 23), smaller than the previous three, features a flaring neck with a simple rim and a pear-shaped body.

Pottery is one of the most common finds in archaeological excavations and is commonly used in archaeological research in order to date the occupation of sites, distinguish between different groups, and shed light

FIGURE 19 Jar attributed to the Beta Israel, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 20 Jar attributed to the Beta Israel, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 21 Jar, Beta Israel ceramics workshop, Be'er Sheva (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 22 Jar attributed to the Beta Israel, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

FIGURE 23 Jar attributed to the Beta Israel, Aṭeyä (B. Kribus/V. Krebs)

on the activities which took place in different spaces within a site. It is hoped that the future examination of ceramic assemblages from Beta Israel monastic sites and their comparison with assemblages originating in non-monastic Beta Israel sites and in contemporary non-Beta Israel sites will shed further light on Beta Israel monasticism.

Was There a Beta Israel Monastery at Aṭeyä?

No indication that a monastic community had ever resided at Aṭeyä was obtained during our visit, and the lack of mention of such a monastic community in all sources pre-dating Beta Israel immigration to Israel examined so far is notable. However, Qes Ḥädanä Täqoyä (2011, 210–212) published a list of Beta Israel monks which includes their places of origin and burial places. As some of the names appearing in the list are of priests, the identity of each individual as a monk should be verified. Four individuals are listed in relation to Aṭeyä: one lived and was buried there, one lived there and passed away in Israel,[27] and two lived elsewhere and were buried there. Therefore, the possibility that a monastic community had resided in the village cannot be discounted and should be further investigated in the future.

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27   Famously, only one practicing Beta Israel monk immigrated to Israel (see above), and he is not the individual listed. Therefore, it is not likely that the listed individual was a practicing monk when he immigrated.

Conclusions

While the number of sites visited during the field season was much smaller than initially hoped for and a variety of factors limited the type and duration of the fieldwork carried out in these sites, the results of the field season can significantly contribute to the study of the material culture of Beta Israel monasticism.

First, it was demonstrated that, contrary to what was initially expected, foundations of both Beta Israel prayer-houses and dwellings were well-preserved and undisturbed by the present inhabitants of the sites visited. Therefore, the study of structures built and utilized by the Beta Israel is possible not only in Təgray province, where structures are typically built primarily out of stone, but also in the Gonder area, where organic materials are typically used in the construction of dwellings, albeit over a stone foundation.

Second, it was demonstrated that, at least in some cases, the former neighbors of the Beta Israel can serve as an invaluable source of information regarding the Beta Israel community, which used to dwell in their vicinity. The people we encountered in the sites visited helpfully volunteered such information and pinpointed Beta Israel-related sites.

And third, two sites which merit further research, both of which are rich in Beta Israel material culture remains, have been identified and the main relevant features within them documented.

As demonstrated by this field season, the information preserved in written sources regarding Beta Israel monasticism is detailed enough to enable the identification of the villages in which Beta Israel monasteries existed. However, identifying the monastery compound within the village or its vicinity is another matter entirely. Due to the similarity of monastic dwellings to the dwellings of the laity, and the typical existence of several

areas surrounded by enclosure walls in the villages of the northern Ethiopian Highlands, it is virtually impossible to identify a Beta Israel monastic compound based solely on the architecture of its components, unless a *mäsgid* is identified within or adjacent to it. This highlights the importance of oral accounts—both from the Beta Israel community residing in Israel and from the rural communities living in the vicinity of Beta Israel-related sites in Ethiopia. It was with the help of such informants that all the sites visited during the field season were pinpointed.

Fortunately, only a few decades have passed since the Beta Israel immigrated to Israel, and there are still informants to be found who can contribute firsthand information regarding their lives in Ethiopia. However, if this information is not thoroughly documented in the next few decades, many aspects of Beta Israel monasticism and of Beta Israel material culture, history, and life in Ethiopia in general will forever remain obscure.

Acknowledgements

and Morton Mandel School for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The research on Beta Israel monasticism, which this field season is a part of, is also supported by the Ben-Zvi Institute, the Ruth Amiran Fund for Archaeological Research in Eretz-Israel, the Martin Buber Society of Fellows in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Hebrew University, as well as the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University and the Center for the Study of Christianity at the Hebrew University. We wish to thank the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism for granting us permission to conduct this research.

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Groundwork, Fieldwork and Transnational Research

Christians and Jews in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT   This paper gives a short overview of the current state of research of the study of Beta Israel history, including a response to two papers in this volume by Dege-Müller and Kribus and Krebs that deal with various Beta Israel sources.

KEY WORDS   falasha; Beta Israel literature; Ethiopia; historical archaeology

The past four decades have been unprecedented in the history of the Beta Israel (Fälasha). Beginning in 1977, when a small group legally emigrated to Israel, their lives have been transformed. Today, almost the entire community, some 135,000 individuals, reside in Israel (Kaplan and Salamon 2014).

Ironically, their departure from Ethiopia coincided with the rise of a new scholarly paradigm, which began to place their history and culture firmly in the context of Ethiopia. While popular images, especially in Israel, continued to invoke "Lost Tribes" and a return after thousands of years in exile, academic literature began to reveal the depth of their roots in Northeast Africa. Pioneering works such as those of Shelemay (1989) and Quirin (1992), which were based on fieldwork carried out in the last years before the Ethiopian revolution,[1] were, over time, supplemented by other

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1   Both Shelemay and Quirin completed their dissertations in 1977, the same year as the first legal Beta Israel immigration to Israel.

contributions primarily based on work carried out in Israel (Kaplan 1991; Salamon 1999). To this must be added the work of the prolific anthropologist Jon Abbink (1987, 1990).

In recent years there has been a decided shift. Even if we exclude from our purview the countless studies of the Ethiopian immigrants in Israel, there has also been a clear change in the types of sources used. Shelemay (1989) not only collected oral traditions, but superbly documented Beta Israel liturgical practice in situ. Her conclusion that what she had collected was not a long-preserved ancient Jewish ritual, but a sacred tradition intimately linked to Ethiopian Christian monasticism, has raised hackles, but has not been seriously challenged academically.[2] Quirin (1992), also working in Ethiopia, collected oral histories from dozens of informants. His attempt to understand the Beta Israel as a caste-like group within Ethiopian society has proven a starting point for almost all historical work that has followed. While he is less polemical on the ethnogenesis of the "Fälasha" than Shelemay, Kaplan, and a host of other authors, his work remains a model of careful and balanced scholarship. Salamon's work (1999), while largely retrospective, demonstrates that memories of life in Ethiopia reveal a hitherto overlooked complexity in Jewish-Christian relations. Since then, her work on a variety of topics, including slavery, cattle, and meat (1994, 2003, 2008, 2015), have provided some of the most vivid descriptions of a world that largely survives only in the anecdotes, proverbs, and reminiscences of living in Israel.

Despite these achievements, much work remains to be done. One of the clear paths forward in the study of Beta Israel-Christian relations will be the formulation of a clearer chronology of the various "Jewish/Hebraic/Biblical"

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2   A joint French Israeli project to document and re-analyze Beta Israel liturgy based in Israel was undertaken in the early 1980s. As of this writing, more than thirty years after its initiation, it has yet to produce major findings (cf. Tourny 1997).

elements in Ethiopian Christianity. Only piecemeal progress has been made on this score, and we are still today largely caught between those who view Jewish elements as "survivals" from an early period in Ethiopian history (cf. Ullendorff 1956) and those who are more inclined to date them to later periods, particularly that of the powerful emperor Zär'a Ya'əqob or even later (Rodinson 1964a, 1964b).[3] Certainly the time has come for a more nuanced view. While it is fairly clear that Aramaic loanwords must date, in the classic phrase of H.J. Polotsky (1961, 10), to the Pre-Christian "Jewish leaven in Ethiopian culture", many other elements would appear to be later, even much later. While some have dated the Solomonic legend Kəbrä Nägäśt as early as the sixth century CE (Shahid 1976), most scholars tend to opt for a later date for at least some of its elements (Munro-Hay 2001; Johnson 1995). Curiously, the identification of the Ethiopian monarchy with both the Lion and the Tribe of Judah probably dates to the sixteenth century and may even be an "invention" of the Portuguese (Rubensen 1976). The tri-partite division of Ethiopian churches, reminiscent of the Biblical Temple, does not appear to be an archaic element (Heldman 2003), and has been dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century as well.

Moreover, a host of Biblically themed works possessed by both Ethiopian Christians and the Beta Israel (The Testaments of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, The Death of Aaron, The Conversation of Moses on Mount Sinai), appear to have originally reached Ethiopia in Arabic and thus cannot date earlier than the thirteenth or fourteenth century (Kaplan 1990).

Prior to the 1970s, there is little question that the study of Beta Israel literature took pride of place in the examination of their culture. Beginning with Joseph Halévy (1902), scholars trained in Semitic languages, such as

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3   Many of the key articles in this debate—Ullendorff (1956), Rodinson (1964a, 1964b) and Polotsky (1964)—have been reprinted and, in the case of Rodinson, translated into English in Bausi 2017. See also Munro-Hay (2001) and Johnson (1995) on the Kəbrä Nägäśt.

Aescoly (1951), Leslau (1951), Ullendorff (1961), and Wurmbrand (1961, 1962, 1963a, 1963b, 1964), produced editions and translations of their key works. Although these publications were based on an extremely limited corpus of manuscripts, they played a major role in shaping the image of the Beta Israel. Indeed, given the small number of such manuscripts and the fact that most Beta Israel could not read or even understand these texts in Geʿez, one is inclined to suggest that their significance for an understanding of the Beta Israel may have been overstated. We would do well to consider more seriously the oral component in the transmission of elements within and between Jewish and Christian culture in Ethiopia.

Having said this, it must be noted that in recent decades, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of Ethiopic manuscripts available to scholars both on microfilm and digitally. It is no exaggeration to say that our knowledge of the history of Ethiopic literature has grown exponentially over the past half century.

Thus, the contribution of Sophia Dege-Müller is particularly welcome. Trained in the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies at the University of Hamburg, she possesses all the tools to make a truly original contribution to Beta Israel studies. Already in the present article she makes note of a new Beta Israel manuscript which she catalogued as part of the EthioSPARE project, headed by Denis Nosnitsin.[4] Significantly, it contains at least two compositions not previously listed in studies of Beta Israel literature. Doubtless a wealth of other works remains to be discovered.

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4   *Səmʿu wä-ləbbəw ʾo-däqiqä ʾAdam* "Listen and understand O children of Adam…"; *Gädlä ʾAbrəham* "Vita of Abrəham"; *Nägärä bä-ʾəntä ʿaśärtu qalat* "Story of the Ten Commandments"* (https://mycms-vs03.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_docu ment_00002433?cnDesc=1&images=no&gen). It is unclear if *Gädlä ʾAbrəham* "Vita of Abrəham"* is a new work or a copy of the work known as the Testament of Abreham..

Certainly, the time has come for a new version of Wolf Leslau's *Falasha Anthology*. While the title will obviously have to be redone to reflect modern sensibilities, an *Anthology of Beta Israel Literature: The Literary Heritage of Ethiopian Jewry* will certainly serve many purposes. On the one hand, a clear English translation will make new works accessible and provide better versions of "familiar" texts. In this context, it should be noted that to do justice to the rich oral culture of the Beta Israel, any such volume must contain samples of important oral "texts". On the other, a proper critical edition, particularly one which traces the links between existing Beta Israel manuscripts and Christian exemplars of similar works, will deepen our understanding of the shared cultural milieu of the two groups. In this context, it should be noted that Ted Erho, in a recent discussion of "The Library and Old Testament Manuscripts of Gundä Gunde", reports that several of the manuscripts in the collection contain what was previously assumed to be a Beta Israel phrase: "yətbärak Ǝgziʾabəher amlak Ǝsraʾel" ("Blessed be the Lord God"; Schneider 1963). He suggests that, given the obviously Christian nature of these and some other manuscripts, "this is further evidence for the adoption of Ethiopian Orthodox theological elements during the ethnogenesis of the Betä Ǝsraʾel" (316).

More generally, Dege-Müller can be seen to be building on the initial insight of Verena Krempel (1982), who pointed out that many of the references to Jews (Ayhud) in Geʿez literature are not concerned with the Beta Israel, but with a general category of heretics and rebels. Only with this insight is it possible to begin to distinguish actual references to the ethnic group known from at least the early sixteenth century as the "Fälasha" and a host of other dissidents who flourished in Christian Ethiopia.

Here, too, it is valuable to have her translation of a portion from *Gadlä Gäbrä Iyäsus*, which was originally published by the great Italian scholar Carlo Conti Rossini (1938). According to this source, a dog who was carrying

food on his back "encountered two Jews herding cattle. These Jews were from that tribe of Jews that had fled the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus and had migrated to Ethiopia" (see Annex 3 of Sophia Dege-Müller's article in this volume). Although this saint lived in the fouteenth century, his *gädl* was only written (or re-written) after the original version had been lost in the Muslim conquest of Ahmad Gragn (1506–1543). Significantly, although the author uses the verb *fälaśa* to indicate the migration of the Jews from the land of Israel, he does not connect this to the name Fälaśa. This probably indicates that the term was not (yet) widely used. Moreover, this is the first local Ethiopian source to identify Jews in Ethiopia not as Christian apostates, but as immigrants from the land of Israel, an origin story which will eventually develop into a guiding ideology for the group and its supporters.

Among the many lacunae in the study of the Beta Israel, material culture and historical archaeology are among the most prominent. One need not look far to grasp the reasons for this gap. Until recent years, historical archaeology has received comparatively little attention in Ethiopia in comparison to both pre-history and the study of proto-, pre-, and Aksumite civilization. In addition, there was comparatively little perception of the Beta Israel as a historical people. Because they were viewed as a survival from the Aksumite period, there seemed little point in documenting how their lives had changed over time. Indeed, in one of the most glaring mis-readings of material culture, "Fälaśa" figurines produced beginning in the 1960s with the help of foreign visitors were identified as pre-historic fertility idols (Meinardus 1966, cf. Gamst 1972, Gamst and Baldia 1980, Kaplan and Rosen 1996). Finally, it should of course be noted that the researchers and visitors who visited Beta Israel villages in the late 1960s and early 1970s

had little reason to believe that they would soon be uprooted and that valuable memories of sites would be displaced if not lost altogether.

In this context, the contribution of Kribus and Krebs is quite remarkable and leaves the reader eager to receive further information on this and other sites. Combining the skills of an archaeologist and a historian, with special sensitivity to artefacts and culture, they offer not only their findings but also deep insight into the research process. In contrast to the only previous work of this kind by Klein (2007), Kribus and Krebs seek not to uncover the riches of a major urban location—Gondar—but rather hope to uncover identifiable monastic remains in relatively isolated areas. Since Beta Israel "monasteries" appear to have been made up of simple huts rather than large stone structures, the challenge is considerable. As is clear from the present article, intensive collection of both oral and written sources was necessary to even begin the process of identifying where to search. Thus, even prior to departing for Ethiopia, the authors undertook meticulous work in surveying written sources and supplementing these with oral histories from Beta Israel migrants in Israel. This has then been supplemented with local knowledge from remaining (generally non-Beta Israel) residents. Finds such as remains of a *mäsgid/ṣalota* bet (prayer house) as well as cemetery and smithing tools support a possible identification certainly significant. In this context it should be noted that although the Beta Israel generally belonged to the category of despised craftsmen in Ethiopia (Abbink 1987; Quirin 1992), the line between monasticism and artisans was not always clear (Heldman 2013).

As was noted above, Shelemay and Quirin, each in his/her own way, made a powerful case for the centrality of Beta Israel monasticism in the development of community identity. Moreover, already in the last century, Taamrat Emanuel had shared his knowledge of holy places (Leslau 1974), a survey supplemented by Shoshana Ben Dor (1985) in Israel. None of these

scholars, however, sought to identify the sites or bring to bear the methods and insights of archaeology.

The current pilot project has revealed that using a combination of existing written sources and the still vivid memories of the Beta Israel's mainly Christian neighbors, it is possible to make significant progress on identifying and unearthing material remains. Although the political situation in Ethiopia made it difficult to immediately follow up on this work in 2016, most recently an additional field season in the fall of 2017 has provided rich supplemental material.

While both articles "printed" in this journal share the conviction that the Beta Israel are best understood in the broader context of Christian Ethiopia, they differ markedly in method and purpose. Sophia Dege-Müller has begun the process of reviving a textually-based form of analysis which has largely been dormant for the past quarter century. Krebs and Kribus move boldly into the neglected realm of historical archaeology. Both contributions are of the highest quality and hold the promise of further revelations. Moreover, they move us forward in several of the paths in Beta Israel studies suggested above: the historical analysis of Jewish-Hebraic elements in Ethiopia, the revitalization of the study of Beta Israel literature, and the greater recognition of the importance of oral traditions.

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Mapping Jewish-Christian Relations from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (600-1800)

An Introduction to JCR-MIO

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ABSTRACT   This brief article describes how the research team of the ERC-project *JewsEast* is preparing a major inventory of sources from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean that address Jewish-Christian relations in these regions. In it is explained what types of source material will be treated in the survey.

KEY WORDS   Jewish-Christian relations; Middle East; Caucasus; Ethiopia; Indian Ocean

Although Jewish-Christian relations form a heavily researched topic, studies of these relations have been, by and large, restricted to the areas in which Jews were living in societies dominated by Christianity, mostly around Europe and in Byzantium. One can think of obvious reasons why this is so. Apart from the fact that, in general, the West is a more likely area for research to be chosen by scholars than other parts of the world, the historiography of Jewish-Christian interaction has centred on the uneven balance of power between Christians and Jews in a world where Christianity was dominant and Jews were a minority. Beyond that world of Christian Europe lies a vast geographic area, from the east of the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, where indigenous Christians and Jews have also interacted since Late Antiquity. The study of relationships between these

communities on a local level and their mutual image-making is still in its infancy.

A large research project, funded by the European Research Council and based at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany, intends to counterbalance the study of Jewish-Christian relations by looking at societies beyond Europe, where these relations have hardly been researched and where the social dynamics between the two communities can be expected to have been different. A five-year project, *Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean* (in short: JewsEast), headed by Prof. Alexandra Cuffel under the auspices of the European Research Council (ERC), endeavours to study Jewish-Christian interaction in the Arab world, the Caucasus, Ethiopia, and South India during the period 600–1800.

The Source Survey JCR-MIO

One of the major outcomes of the JewsEast project will be a survey of the relevant sources for Jewish-Christian interaction in these areas. The three-volume source survey will appear under the title *Jewish-Christian Relations from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (600–1800)* at Arc Humanities Press, in print and as an online resource. The researchers involved in JewsEast, whose collective expertise covers the geographical areas and the respective languages, are taking stock of the sources which should be discussed in the volumes. Relevant sources are those that describe and/or construct the relations between Jews and Christians, either between the communities and religions as a whole or as reflected in contacts between individual members of these religions. The amount of sources to be included is vast and covers a wide variety of genres: historiography,

letters, biblical exegesis, apocalypses, refutations, travelogues, theological handbooks, hagiography, inscriptions, and so on. A large share consists of normative writings, whose authors' primary aim was to create clear boundaries between the two religions: refutations, polemical legends, and apologetics. In the Arab world, in particular, Christians wrote many texts of the *Adversus Judaeos* genre, but they are also to be found among the Armenians, Georgians, and Ethiopians. Another genre aimed at creating boundaries is legal literature. There are a considerable number of legal sources in which norms are set about intermarriage, conversion, and daily encounters.

In contrast to these are numerous writings which are not based on preconceived constructs about Jewish-Christian difference, for example certain chronicles and letters. They are descriptive or documentary in character and capture a world where, at times, the boundaries between the religions were more fluid, for example when we read of a Jewish teacher in Baghdad sending his visiting student to the Patriarch to discuss an exegetical point (Dubovick 2018) or a Coptic Christian visiting a Jewish scholar to ask about the exact quantity of oil needed for the preparation of the chrism (Villecourt 1928). The Cairo Geniza is of crucial importance in this respect. It provides us with texts which reflect the social and economic interactions between the communities (Cuffel, forthcoming). Each document which sheds light on intercommunal interactions will be discussed individually in JCR-MIO. These interactions are not only masked by the more formal and prescriptive texts, but also because the bulk of writings of each community is predominantly focused on internal dynamics. This aspect of the source material represents a practical challenge for the JCR-MIO project: the search for depictions of and reflections on Jewish-Christian interaction in the broader, non-confrontational, literary output over these hundreds of years evokes the proverbial needle in the haystack.

Nevertheless, the JewsEast research team has taken on this challenging task, which forms one of the pillars of the envisaged source survey.

In addition to written sources, parts of the volumes will be devoted to material culture. One can think here of depictions of Jews found in Armenian manuscripts, the Kollam Copper plates' inscription reflecting Jewish and Christian encounter in South India, and archeological finds which shed light on the interaction between Christians and the Beta Israel in Ethiopia (see, for example, Kribus and Krebs 2018).

Writings by Outsiders

There is yet another relevant category of writings: those written by outsiders, that is to say, by authors who are neither Eastern Christian nor Jewish. One important genre here is travelogues, written, for example, by European pilgrims to Jerusalem and Muslim travelers touring the world of Islam. Such texts do not focus on Jewish-Christian relations per se, but they may shed sidelight on these through observations and anecdotal descriptions of events. For instance, the seventh-century abbot of Iona, Adomnán, related the pilgrimage of a bishop called Arculf to Jerusalem in his *De Locis Sanctis.* Although much of the narrative may not reflect an eyewitness account of the seventh-century Near East, Hoyland and Waidler have argued that despite its miraculous elements, a passage about 'believing Jews' (converts to Christianity or Judeo-Christians) and 'unbelieving Jews' appealing to the Caliph Muʿāwiya during a dispute about a cloth from Christ's sepulcher might well reflect a historical controversy (2014).

Among the works by outsiders are also works of Islamic law which deal partially or wholly with dhimmīs. The Muslim authors mostly saw them

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as one category and did not differentiate between them or regulate their mutual relations. There are exceptions, however. For example, the Ḥanbalī jurist Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 923) deals with the question of interreligious encounters between dhimmīs (Prejean, forthcoming).

The Quest for Sources

In the ongoing quest for relevant sources, the JewsEast team benefits from a number of classic survey works, such as Steinschneider's *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden* (Leipzig 1877) and Graf's *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (5 vols, Città del Vaticano, 1944–1953), as well as more recent studies, such as Rosenkranz's *Die jüdisch-christliche Auseinandersetzung unter islamischer Herrschaft. 7.–10. Jahrhundert* (Bern 2004). However, from the beginning of the project, it has become clear that the works featured in these studies are only the tip of the iceberg. Numerous unknown or unstudied texts are coming to light through two different channels. First of all, there are a number of ongoing digitization and cataloguing projects. Major libraries such as the Vatican Library, the National Library of France, and the British Library are digitizing their manuscripts as we speak. The cataloguing and digitizing efforts of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at St John's University, Minnesota, have opened up an immense world of major and minor manuscript collections. For Ethiopia, the project of Ethio-Spare at the University of Hamburg is an asset. For the exploration of the Cairo Geniza, we benefit from the 'Friedberg Genizah Project' of the Friedberg Jewish Manuscript Society and the Cambridge Digital Library.

A second avenue leading to the discovery of many more relevant sources is through the rereading of known texts which have not been read

before with an eye to studying Jewish-Christian interaction. A prominent example is the genre of Christian Arabic apologetics. Works of this genre have been read by scholars as windows on early Muslim-Christian relations in the Middle East. Indeed, many of them appear to have been written in response to Islamic domination and polemic. Yet, numerous of these texts pay ample attention to Jews and aim to prescribe attitudes to Judaism by explaining how Jews fail to recognize the Christian view of the "Divine plan". Hagiographies often incorporate attitudes towards Judaism, too, but may not have been read through that lens before. The same counts for exegetical works. Anti-Christian tendencies in Jewish exegesis have been noticed by modern scholars, yet only a systematic rereading of the relevant texts will lay bare to what extent the exegetes aimed at conveying their views on Christianity in their works.

Describing the Source Material

Each and every individual work will be treated separately in JCR-MIO, but obviously there will be more to say about a source devoting ample attention to the Other or even having the other religion its primary target than a source which contains the occasional comment about interreligious encounters. Works which fall into that first category will be dealt with in more elaborate entries, which give a brief introduction to its author, a detailed description of the contents, themes, and reception of the work of up to 700 words, and its full bibliography, including references to manuscripts if the text is unedited. In cases where the text was translated into another language, the reception in the new language will be discussed as well. Transmission from one Eastern Christian language to another was quite common and hence we see works such as the Syriac Life of ʿAbd al-

Masīḥ in later versions in Arabic, Armenian, and Georgian (Butts and Gross 2016). Bringing together the various versions of such travelling tales will help to map out the routes along which texts—and, therefore, ideas— travelled. These longer entries will be arranged chronologically and cover a significant part of the three volumes.

Sources which deal only partially with the other religion, for example midrash, liturgical texts, or the numerous Christian refutations of Islam in which Jews play a subsidiary role, will be grouped according to genre and feature in entries, which are shorter but nevertheless highlight the main themes and the relevant scholarly literature.

Limits

The research team is casting a wide net in its search for relevant sources and in its aim to be as comprehensive as possible, and will include some texts which, upon closer consideration, may only seem of marginal importance for the study of eastern Jewish-Christian relations. There is the pitfall of over-inclusion. We can think of hundreds of Christian texts in which there are trivial references to Jesus' Jewish origins. They will not be deemed relevant. Decision-making about texts of borderline relevance requires much reflection and discussion. A rule of thumb has nevertheless been established: if texts revolve only around one's own community and feature the other community only as part of that discussion because of prior and known adoption of notions of that latter community into the former, then the text does not express a fact or idea about Jewish-Christian relations (historical, contemporary, or idealized). Therefore, the text will not be included. A good example is a recently translated law book, written by a seventh-century East-Syrian scholar, which contains an introduction

to the evolution of Christian law (Harrak 2017). The author explains that Christian law is partly derived from Mosaic law but that not all of Mosaic law is relevant for Christians. He gives some examples to show that some of the Mosaic laws were intended only for the Jewish people and he points out that even for them, over time, practice diverged from scriptural norms. The remark that Jewish law has evolved over time is a very general one and, for the rest his reflection on Mosaic law, is only part of the jurist's sketch of the origins of canon law. Its significance does not seem to go beyond that. This is why the text will not be dealt with in JCR-MIO.

Limitations

For the Middle Eastern part of the project, there is a wealth of sources to consider. For other regions, such as the Caucasus and South India, the source material is scarcer. This means that the source survey may not accurately reflect the quantity or quality of contact between Jews and Christians in these areas over history. However, the source survey is meant precisely for unearthing more sources and ones of better quality for those regions that are currently left outside of scholarly attention.

Outcome

The volumes are expected to appear between 2019 and 2021. They will be a significant step in the study of global Jewish-Christian relations. Hopefully, they will lay the foundation for the study of Jewish-Christian relations in the Eastern hemisphere as a new field of research.

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