
Magdalen M. Connolly

The manuscript BnF Hébreu 583 (dated 1839 CE) contains, amongst other material, three Egyptian Judaeo-Arabic (JA) tales, depicting fictional events in the life of Abraham ibn ‘Ezra (c. 1089–1167), the renowned Jewish biblical scholar and polymath. This edition focuses on the third of these tales, in which Abraham ibn ‘Ezra, brought from Cairo by two students at the urgent behest of a rabbi, saves the life of the rabbi’s son and secures the freedom of the town’s Jewish community. While the

1 This short piece is a condensed and updated version of Connolly (2018, 392–420). I am grateful to the University of Uppsala Press for allowing me to reproduce the article, here.

2 This manuscript was kindly made available to me by the Département de la reproduction at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. As of 2016, the manuscript is available to view online at http://gallica.bnf.fr/html/und/manuscrits/manuscrits.

3 These three tales are found in fols 134v–140v. The first tale is in fols 134v–137r, line 18; the second tale is in fols 137r, line 19–139r, line 18; and the third tale—reproduced here—is contained within fols 139r, line 19–140v, line 20. Another version of this tale is found in CUL T-S Ar.46.10.

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literary content of this tale and its socio-historical context⁴ are doubtless worthy of exploration, this short contribution is restricted to a transliteration of the original text, with transcoding into Arabic script,⁵ and an English translation.⁶

⁴ Of particular note in this tale is the blood-libel accusation—directed throughout the middle ages at Jewish communities by Christians within Europe and, later in the 1800s, by Syrian Christian communities at their Jewish counterparts. Here, the blood-libel accusation is inverted and levelled against a Christian community. Tensions between Christian and Jewish communities in Egypt and Syria began in the late 17th century, driven by shifts in the political landscape, which—in the case of Egypt—had profound economic and social consequences for Cairo’s Jewish inhabitants (Masters 2001, 117). The colophon on f. 174v dates the copying of these tales to Monday, 16th Tevet 1839. It, therefore, predates the infamous ‘Damascus Affair’ of 1840 by a few months (see Frankel 1997; Masters 2001; and Florence 2004 for details of the ‘Damascus Affair’). As such, this text adds another dimension to Master’s assertion that blood-libel accusations were circulating among (Syrian) Christian Arabs before the Damascus Affair (Masters 2001, 123). This tale indicates that some Jews were engaging with the accusation and turning it back on their Christian neighbours.

⁵ In transcoding the text into Arabic script, I hope to make this JA text, with its many interesting linguistic features, available to a wider audience interested in varieties of Middle Arabic. In so doing, I follow the practice pioneered by Diem (2014) and suggested to me by Dr. Esther-Miriam Wagner (in conversation).

⁶ A Hebrew edition of three tales from the manuscript BnF Hébreu 583 was first produced by Yitzhak Avishur (1992). Avishur’s interest in the folk narrative appears to have been predominantly literary and
As is evident in the spelling of consonantal \( \text{wāw} \) and \( \text{yā' with double \text{vav} and \text{yod} \), respectively, frequent Hebrew lexical items, the occurrence of \( \text{niktib-niktibū} \) forms, and the consistent separation of the definite article,\(^7\) this folk narrative contains several features often referred to as characteristic of late JA. These features are found alongside classical JA features, limited CA influence, Middle Arabic practices, and contemporaneous Arabic dialectal features.

From the \textit{plene} spelling of short vowels and the denotation of the 3ms pronominal suffix with \text{vav} to the presence of the colloquial verb \text{gāb} ‘to bring’, the fifth form’s prosthetic \text{‘alef}, and the use of the construct-state particle \text{bitā‘}, this text reveals numerous colloquial features that are characteristic of Modern Cairene Arabic. In the presence of the JA relative pronoun, CA-influenced demonstrative pronouns, and complex adverbial subordinators, the text also displays a preoccupation with raising the register above the quotidian, an aspiration which is partially achieved through these aforementioned features.

Furthermore, the use of the diacritical dot and consonantal representation indicate both a continuation of classical JA historical and his transliteration does not reflect the true state of the text’s orthographic features. A new transliteration is, therefore, required for the manuscript to be of use to broader audiences; linguistic as well as literary and historical. This paper serves as a supplement to the existing edition by Avishur, presenting a new transliteration and translation of one of three Egyptian Judaeo-Arabic tales found in the manuscript BnF Hébreu 583.

\(^7\) For a discussion of the separation of the definite article in JA, see Connolly (2021).
spelling practices—for example, in the representation of ẓād with ṣade and a supralinear diacritical dot, and the enduring, albeit limited, influence of contemporaneous Arabic orthographic practices evident in the application of the diacritic to graphemes such as pe for fā’, dalet for dāl, and kaf for ħā’, in imitation of the physical form of their Arabic graphemic equivalents.8

Notes on the Edition

The text has been as faithfully rendered as possible, including all diacritics and orthographic idiosyncrasies found in the original manuscript. The JA text has then been transcoded into Arabic script, grapheme-for-grapheme. No adjustments or amendments have been made to the text in its transcoded form. As for the English translation, any additions intended to aid comprehension and readability are enclosed in parenthesis ().

Transliteration

139r.

8 On the use of diacritical dots in late JA, see Connolly forthcoming.
9 The term ʿurālīm ‘uncircumcised’ (sg. ʿurāl) is used to refer to Christians (Jastrow 2005, 1119).
10 "ז"ע ‘idolatry’ (עָבֹדָה וַד)
139v.

This may read הוא 'he' rather than היא 'here'.

"With the help of God" (השם בערしゃת). In Arabic الكحك ka'k/kahk “cookies of flour, butter, and sometimes a sweet filling or a dusting of sugar, baked for special occasions” (Hinds and Badawi 1986, 737). In light of the context in which these ‘cookies’ are consumed in this tale, however, it is possible that ka'k here refers not to celebratory cookies but to matzōt, the unleavened bread consumed during Passover (see preceding footnote).
140r.

atalog הבניינים והחכמים על חלולותם פĳ דרכו ואל רא יא וערא ואל

tלמידים על כתב הខ יהוraq ואל חכמים ואל בלא איברואן פĳ בלא פĳ חכמים פĳ
ארור תעד חאתיי על דכל פĳ קאלו על של ????? פĳ קאלו долן ואל ראב אמסכ
מחכמים תרגי ואל חכמים על דכל פĳ קאלו долן ואל ראב אמסכ
פĳ תרב פĳ ממסכ תרפכ וה שפ שפ של ????? פĳ קאלו долן ואל ראב אמסכ
והם פĳ בלא באחיכ על דרועו פĳ טרפי פĳ תלבכ פיי קאלו долן ואל ראב אמסכ
ואזינוב אתחי קוח החכמים על בלא קאלו долן ואל ראב אמסכ
וןכ פĳ מזר ואל ראב אמסכ אשתם חכמים על חלולותם פĳ על בלא איברואן פĳ
ול חכים פĳ טרפי עלא פĳ טרפי פĳ מסכ פĳ מסכ פĳ קאלו долן איברואן פĳ
פĳ קאלו долן פĳ בלד פĳ בלא פĳ נטע פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ
ונכ פĳ מזר ואל ראב אמסכ אשתם חכמים על חלולותם פĳ על בלא איברואן פĳ
ול חכים פĳ טרפי עלא פĳ טרפי פĳ המסכ פĳ המסכ פĳ קאלו долן איברואן פĳ
פĳ קאלו долן פĳ בלד פĳ בלא פĳ נטע פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ
ונכ פĳ מזר ואל ראב אמסכ אשתם חכמים על חלולותם פĳ על בלא איברואן פĳ
ול חכים פĳ טרפי עלא פĳ טרפי פĳ המסכ פĳ המסכ פĳ קאלו долן איברואן פĳ
פĳ קאלו долן פĳ בלד פĳ בלא פĳ נטע פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ בלא פĳ

14: 'Praise the Lord!' (सबहका ला नाम).
15: ‘Peace be upon him’ (השלום عليه).
140v.

אשכחו והתחפשו. פך רכוב אד בר advisers. כז והלא כי קלב
1. אל תתרמץoken וкамל הלא אל ערלי אשتخון תעשוי. פך קאלﬀום אד בר
2. אב' תוד תחתון או נטפל אל קסע אל בכיי פך זבז הבית
3. פך אל תיבנה פך תתרמץין埃尔 הלא אל модели. פך קאלﬀום ערלים
4. سمיה מוטשת פך איתר אל קסע אל ברי והותת פך זבז הבית.
5. וחבר אל מוכת הלא אל ב릴 ואתרון
6. פך אל תיבנה פך תתרמץין [sic.] 16 אל כינוים. פיפ טאלזר אץ החרודות עבראל פפסל מנהות אד ראב
7. אברום פרבחין פיפ גואל תורבודין פיפ טעל אל ראב אברום הל
8. נתפס לזווד תע'י אל בנייה שלדנו אל קיורון וקאלﬀום אד
9. יומר אנכת ממנחתך טז אלו סכינה. פיפ נע אליי תעז
10. אל סכינה פיפ אנכוןוה מנסים אל ערלים הלא עהלום או פנס אל
11. תעימ פפא בודד הלא יא אל ראב ילא ממנהות קאלﬀום אל אנכיל
12. ממקניךו הלעי אד לאר לארגו אד טולאד פיפ היתון הל
13. ממורתך הקדרות התוכך פיפ נואר. פיפ kHz אושא אל ערלם
14. חימרל קקיעת קלבות ינשיות עינוים הקאלﬀום אד ססיי אד יאדו אדרפה
15. יגנצד ענהה וה адрес השיא אל ממנהות ברך אל יזרה מדך
16. אפרוחות והן נכתבלות菲尔Mexico פיפ או פיפ או הלא מתעמל
17. וה Carey כי סכין יאדו כי קאלﬀום פימרפהול_slow בתשלמה
18. יאדו כי סכין יאדו כי קאלﬀום פימרפהול_slow בתשלמה
19. ולהזו ודרק באיקוות אפרוחות למבילות ינשלים בעפס סכיןון של חוה
20. נContextHolder והתחפשהו אל ראב לבלדי פרות ינעלים יאדו פ

Arabic Transliteration

139r.

איבש אים באנ inna that the word 'sedan chair' is written here in two parts, whereas elsewhere it reads as a single word (סדרת). (סדרת)
16 ב' אמרו. 'His will be done!' (כז)
17 כז והלא כזם.
مصروفو من عند ال‌‌ژولاس طول ال‌سنة: وحين يجي ال‌متعود

139v.

1. ياخدوا بيمكب عظيم وكل الذي يطلبون بنول: في سنة من ال‌سنين
عملوا ال‌‌ژولاس طلعا علاأين ال‌رب بنعت ذلك ال‌بلد وكان
عمرهم عشرين سنة ولم كان ال‌‌ژولاس عندو خلافو. وكان ذلك ال‌ولد
ليس له نظير فأل دونيا من ال‌فصاحا وال‌قرابة وخلافو في حين الذي
طلعب ال‌‌ژولاس علاأا ال‌ولد قامو بال‌بكاء وال‌صياح وال‌‌نواح وال‌حوزن
وكان متعود الذي ياخده ال‌ولد يقربوه يحكموا أول ليلت في
ال‌نفط ال‌‌ژولاس لاتنين من ال‌ التلميديس وقال لهم تعروفو تروجو مصر.

2. لعند ال‌رب أبهرام: ال‌ژولاس تسليمو لهو هذا ال‌جواب وتعروف
في هذى ال‌دعوو ومن جيهت اهل مزلكو نحن نصرف عليهم
لحين ما متعضرو وبشير لم تعروفو فال‌طريق : لأن من هذى ال

3. بلد لمصر تلت اوشور رواج ونلت أوشور مجحي وเทคนشف
تقعوبو في مصر شهر بيصر سبعت اوشور لحين ما متعضرو في
قالل لهو سبعت موضع يا سيبدا في كتب لهوم جوابو واتوجهو
لمصر من بعد تلت أوشور حووضو في مصر. وجدوا واحد عنن
ماشي فال سكة سالو فين بيت ال‌رب أبهرام: ال‌ژولاس في قال لهوم

4. هذا انا اعطو لهو ال‌جواب : في قال لهوم لم فهبه

17. "لا لا يمنونه مماكوم نقصي هادئ ال‌دعوو ولم يكون إلا خير: في
اخذهما ال‌‌ژولاس وقعدو عندو وبعد شهر قامو لهو يا سيبدا
18. نريدو نتووجهو لاجل ال‌دعوو تتمها في قال لهوم ال‌‌ژولاس لم
وعدو نتطاضبو في شان ذلك : انه وقت ما نريد نتووجهو فقعدو
19. ليلت ال‌‌ژولاس من بعد ما عمل ال‌‌رب مزيل الم تارحو
20. في قاريا قعدو لأربع سعات من ال‌ليل لحين ما مغيبت ال‌قرابه
21. في فوق كعلب بسرج في اعطو لل‌‌رب كعكين وال‌‌تلميديس كل
22. واحد كعكين واتوجهو لحالكمو في اخد طريقو ال‌‌رب ال‌ژولاس وال
23. هالميديس

140r.

1. التلميديس معو واتوجهو في عوياض ما يتووجهو لل بيت حكم ال
2. جاري طلعو ناحيت ال‌خلية في قالو ال‌‌تلميديس با سيبدا لابين
3. متووجهون نحن دا احا بقينا فال‌‌خلية في قال لهوم ال‌‌ژولاس المسكنو
A 19th-Century Judaeo-Arabic Folk Narrative

140v.

1. אحسن והحسن. وفي רקב אל הר אברם ועוזר את הנד גוז וולד. וגוז וולד. בלב
2. אל תخروוון וגוואו להוים. ואלה אוף אגן אשתו בלב. בלב.
3. אברם ארצה אטרפש על קיבוצי. והופך בקדושה. ואל תצו
4. ו룸 אל קיבוצי. וגוואו להוים שניח ו섬 וyyyyMMdd. וממסר בקדושה והופך בקבוע.
5. וממסר בקבוע והופך בקדושה. ואל תצו
6. ו룸 אל קיבוצי. וגוואו להוים שניח ו섬. וממסר בקדושה. והופך בקבוע.
7. הקבוצה. وفي סלולהוים ישיר ידו. ולאן לדו וולד. וולד. באברם. וקみなさん.
8. באברם וקみなさん. בסלולהוים ישיר ידו. ולאן לדו וולד. וולד. באברם. וקみなさん.
10. הקבוצה. ונדדה והجرى אל קיבוצי. והופך בקדושה. וקみなさん. בסלולהוים ישיר ידו. ולאן לדו וולד. וולד. באברם. וקみなさん.
11. הקבוצה. ונדדה והجرى אל קיבוצי. והופך בקדושה. וקみなさん. בסלולהוים ישיר ידו. ולאן L שלמים וنزل עליהוים אלفع אל.
Translation

139r.

(19) They also recounted that in one of the towns of the uncircumcised, every (20) year during their feast day, they would take one of the Jews, making him a sacrifice for the(ir) idols. (21) (Every year,) the Jews would cast lots for the children of the Jews in order that (22) they might know who would be made a sacrifice the following year, so that he might take (23) his expenses from the uncircumcised during the (remaining) year. When the appointed time came,

139v.

(1) they would take him in a great procession, and all that he asked for would be granted. One year, (2) they cast the lot, (and) it fell on the son of the rabbi of that town. He was (3) twenty years old and the rabbi had no other (children) besides him. This boy had (4) no equal in the world in terms of eloquence and the recitation (of the Torah), and so on. When (5) the lot fell on the boy, they began weeping, wailing, mourning, and grieving. (6)
(The) date on which they would take the boy and present him as a sacrifice was decided as the first night of Passover. (7) So, the rabbi turned to two of (his) students, saying to them, “You know you will go to Cairo, (8) to the place of Rabbi Abraham ibn ʿEzra, peace be upon him! You will deliver this letter to him and you will inform (him) (9) of this appeal. As for the people of your home(s), we will support them (10) until you return and on the condition that you do not tarry on the road. From this (11) town to Cairo it is three months going and three months coming back. No doubt (12) you will stay in Cairo for a month. It will, thus, be seven months until you return.” (13) They replied, “We hear you and are obedient, O, our master.” So he wrote a letter for them and they set off (14) for Cairo. After three months, they arrived in Cairo and they happened upon a poor man (15) walking along the sidestreet. They asked him, “Where is the house of Abraham ibn ʿEzra?” He replied, (16) “Here I am!” They gave him the letter. Then he said to them, “There’s nothing for it! (17) With God’s help, I will come with you and I will answer this appeal and all will be well.” He then (18) took them to his home, (where) they stayed with him. After a month, they said to him, “O our master, (19) we wish to go so that you can see to the appeal.” The Rabbi replied, “You should (20) no longer address me with regard to this matter. I will go when I see fit.” So, they stayed (21) until

18 I am grateful to Dr. Nadia Vidro for her suggested translation of this sentence.
the night of the eve of Passover. After the Rabbi did the *chametz*¹⁹ check, they went (22) for recitation. They sat for four hours during the night until the recitation was finished. (23) Then, they distributed the *ka’k* with sesame oil. They gave two *ka’k* to the Rabbi and two *ka’k* to each of the (24) students. Then, they set out to (tend to) their business. Rabbi Abraham ibn ʿEzra went on his way, and the (25) (catchword)

140r.

(1) students accompanied him and they set off (together). Instead of going to the house (from which) the current (2) decree (came), they went off in the direction of the wilderness. The students exclaimed, “O, our master, where (3) are we going? This (seems to us like) we are still in the wilderness!” The Rabbi replied, “Stay (4) close to me.” So they stayed where they were. He called out a Name (but) not till dawn broke over them (did they realise that) (5) that they were in the town from which the appeal came. The students saw the town (6) and were astonished! One (of them) said, “this is our town!” But the other exclaimed, “this is not our town, (7) we’re (still) in Cairo!” Rabbi Abraham walked in front of them until they arrived at the house of the (8) sage. They

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¹⁹ *Chametz* refers to food that contains grains which have been mixed with water, and left to rise. In Judaism, it is forbidden to eat any products containing *chametz* from the day before Passover until the end of Passover. During this period, only *matzōt* (unleavened bread) is consumed. On the day before Passover, all *chametz* food must be removed from the house, hence, the ‘*chametz* check’. 
knocked on the door. The sage came down, (and) opened the door (9) and found Rabbi Abraham standing on his doorstep. The sage assumed that he was a beggar, so he (10) said to him, “What do you want? Do you not know of our situation?” Rabbi Abraham replied, (11) “Yes, (I) know about your appeal, but you should trust in God, He is exalted! He will perform miracles for you!” (12) The sage turned and found the two students whom he had sent to Cairo (13) (in search of) Rabbi Abraham ibn ʿEzra. He greeted them and said to them, “Tell me what happened!” (14) They replied, “O our master, it is Rabbi Abraham ibn ʿEzra who stands in front of you!” So (15) he introduced himself and they took (him along with them) and he entered the house. After they had prayed in the synagogue, (16) the students told the master, (the) rabbi, about what had happened, and they showed him the ʿakāk with sesame oil, (17) which (they still had) with them. The rabbi was amazed at this. (Meanwhile,) Rabbi Abraham ibn ʿEzra—may God help him—(18) spoke to the boy who was intended to be taken, and made an offering to the idols, “When they come (19) in the procession to take you, tell them that I will be with you. And when they say (20) to you, ‘(whatever) you wish for, you will be granted’, say to them, ‘what(ever) my companion desires.’” The boy replied, (21) “I hear (and) am obedient.” After only two hours, the uncircumcised came in a great procession (22) in order to seize the boy (to) parade him through the town. The boy said to them, (23) “Take me and my companion with me, and what(ever) is done to me, shall be done to (24) my companion.” The uncircumcised replied, “We have one (already), but if you have given us two,
(1) so much the better!” So, Rabbi Abraham ibn ‘Ezra rode, along with the boy, in the middle of (2) the sedan chair. The uncircumcised said to them, “(Whatever) you wish for, you will be granted,” to which Rabbi (3) Abraham ibn ‘Ezra replied, “I wish you to put the high priest into a large gunny sack and bind (4) the opening of the sack to the sedan chair until the procession is over.” The uncircumcised said, (5) “We hear and are obedient.” So they took the high priest, lowered him into a sack, and tied (6) the opening of the sack to the sedan chair. The procession was swept along as they went around the town. Then they went (7) (to) the church. They asked them, “What do you want to eat?” Rabbi Abraham ibn ‘Ezra asked them (8) for two chickens. So they brought two chickens for them. Then Rabbi Abraham went into the (9) church and he summoned (the) large idol(s) to which they made the sacrifice(s). He said, “O, (10) bastard! Get down from your place and sharpen this knife!” The idol got down and sat, sharpening (11) the knife. All of the uncircumcised were speechless and great fear descended upon them. (12) Afterwards, Rabbi Abraham ibn ‘Ezra summoned his (i.e., the male idol’s) female bastard, saying to her, “Get down (13) from your place, and kindle the fire, so that we may cook the chickens!” The female idol (14) descended and sat, blowing (on) the fire. When the uncircumcised saw (15) this, she stilled their hearts and darkened their eyes. They exclaimed, “O, lord of the Jews, dispel (16) your anger towards us and return the idols to their places for us, take the Jew with you, (17) and go! We will write an edict for you
that from today we will never again claim (18) one (of your people), each year.” Then, they wrote an edict for them, signed (it), and gave (it) (19) to them. Then they went on their way, setting off for their home, (where) they made a Passover festival, the like of which (20) had never been seen. Then, Rabbi Abraham ibn ʿEzra returned to his town. May His virtue protect us! Amen. His will be done!