

Jews in Khorasan Before the Mongol Invasion

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A hoard of Jewish documents, many of them in Persian, Arabic or Judaeo-Persian and Judeo-Arabic, was discovered in Afghanistan not long ago. The circumstances of the find are not entirely clear and it is impossible to tell where exactly they were found. According to information given by traders, they were discovered in a cave, dispersed on the ground and not in a container. The cave was also a home to some small animals. New documents continue to arrive on the market, and it is possible that some of the material was dispersed to other locations.

I received news of the find from antique dealers who held portions of this hoard and sent me photos of some of the documents. Having examined the original manuscripts in London, I became convinced that this was indeed a remarkable find. Some of the papers turned out to be pages from bound codices, others were letters or legal deeds, written for the most part in the Hebrew script, and going back to the medieval period.

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There are several literary genres represented in this collection. Among those identified are translations and commentaries (both called in Arabic and Persian *tafsir*) relating to different portions of the Hebrew Bible. Most of them are written in Judeo-Persian, but some in Judeo-Arabic. The Judeo-Arabic fragments are predominantly from a *tafsir* of the Book of Isaiah by Rav Saadia Gaon, a prominent Jewish author of the tenth century. This particular book was already known before by fragments retrieved from the Cairo Geniza. There are also fragments of commentaries on the Bible written in Hebrew, whose authors have not yet been identified. In this Khorasan hoard there are portions of compositions discussing points of Jewish doctrine written in Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew, sections from books specifying the order of prayer in the synagogue on various holidays, evidently from a prayer-book in Judeo-Persian. Pages of poetry are also part of these papers. Most leaves carry texts of Hebrew synagogue poetry, known by the generic term *piyyut*, but there is among them one lengthy poem which was no doubt composed in Judeo-Persian. It is a dirge on the death of a prominent member of the Jewish community. It is spread over several pages, and appears to have been conserved in its entirety.

Another portion of these papers consists of personal correspondence, accounts, declarations of debt (*iqrār*), and records of judicial courts. Most of these documents are in Judeo-Persian, standard Persian, or Arabic. It seems clear from this correspondence that the people who wrote these papers and who owned these documents were speakers of Persian who belonged to a Jewish community residing in Bam-iyān, though in some cases the letters were sent from Ghazneh or other localities in the same region. They spoke the language of the area where they lived, that is Khorasani Persian, but they usually wrote it with their own script, which was the Hebrew alphabet. This is a very important point: for the first time we have in our hands original informal and literary manuscripts written in the language spoken in Khorasan by members of the Jewish minority. Ethnic and religious minorities tend to use the local language, sometimes with some minor deviations from the standard form of the language. Such peculiarities may be linked to their religious background, especially in the lexical field, or to a history of migration from another area, when there is a marked difference between the minority dialect and the current local dialect. Some of the peculiarities, however, may be described as archaism: this happens most likely because of a long history of separate existence of the communities, when a minority tends to adhere to some of the features of the language that have undergone changes in the main form of the local dialect but these changes were not adopted by the speakers of the minority dialect.

Some of the papers carry precise dates. This applies naturally to the legal documents, which relate typically to disputes between partners in commercial undertakings, where it is crucial to note the date. All the recorded dates seen so far fall within the first half of the eleventh century of the current era. The Arabic documents use the Muslim era calendar, and give the years according to the Hijra, while the Judeo-Persian documents note the dates according to the Jewish-Babylonian system of lunar months, and the years are given, as was the custom among Jews, according to the Seleucid era which starts at 312/311 BCE. All the dates given converge, as said above, in a fairly narrow time-span in the eleventh century. We may assume that the cache of documents was deposited in the cave not much after the mid- eleventh century. Some of the literary documents, which are all undated, may be older than that period, and should reflect a haphazard cross-section of the books used over a period of time by the owners of this collection of papers.

Why the documents were put away is not very clear. Did the owners try to hide them when they were forced to leave their homes in an emergency? We have a famous analogy for a find of a large quantity of old Jewish documents. This is the case of the Cairo Geniza, which was discovered towards the end of the nineteenth century. It was placed in an attic room of an ancient synagogue, the Ben-Ezra synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo). Over a very long period, Jewish writings were deposited there, mainly in order to preserve the Hebrew script from desecration, as this script normally comprises also the sacred names of God and often also quotations from the Holy Scriptures. There was a well-known custom in several Jewish communities to dispose of old documents in a burial place, as if they were a human corpse. This was not the practice in Cairo. The written fragments were allowed to accumulate over a millennium and their state of preservation in the dry climate of Cairo was remarkably good.¹ Does this help us understand the reason for placing the newly-found writings from Khorasan? The reports about the place where the documents were found do not suggest that they were found either in a synagogue or in a place of burial, and so it is unlikely that they formed a “Geniza” in the precise sense of this term. We have no good theory to explain why they were put in a cave. Those who discovered the documents may not be the best source of information as to the original place of discovery. Their action was not strictly legal, and giving away the precise location of the find might not be in their best interest. The most likely theory as to the circumstances under which this bundle of documents was deposited in one place

¹Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), 676.

is that a small group of people, perhaps all belonging to a single family, put them in hiding owing to some emergency. We know, however, of no major event in the mid-eleventh century that would compel a group of people to abandon their town.

It has been known for some time that there were Jewish communities in Afghanistan in the pre-Mongol period. Since the nineteen-fifties several dozen tombstones from an ancient Jewish cemetery in the area of Ghūr have been discovered. The inscriptions from several dozen tombstones written in Judeo-Persian have already been published and others are likely to be still in situ or in the hands of private owners.² This was an important find, which not only established the fact that Jewish communities existed at that time in Khorasan, but also gave us some information about one of them. Tombstones however do not normally carry extensive texts. We get a handful of names of Jews buried in the cemetery, as well as some titles of office or dignity that were attributed to certain individuals, but these are not always very illuminating.³ The tombstones are not very informative about the kind of life this Jewish community conducted, and there is very little information concerning the type of Judaism to which they adhered. Fortunately, most of the stones carry dates.

²The first scholar who worked on the discovery and publication of the tombstones is Eugen Rapp. See Eugen Ludwig Rapp, *Die jüdisch-persisch-hebräischen Inschriften aus Afghanistan, Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft, Beiheft G.* (München: J. Kitzinger, 1965); "Die persische-hebräischen Inschriften Afghanistans aus dem 11. bis 13. Jahrhundert," *Sonderdruck aus dem Jahrbuch der Vereinigung "Freunde der Universität Mainz"* (1971); "Neue persisch-hebräische Inschriften Afghanistans aus dem Mittelalter. Eine Gesamtübersicht," *Jahrbuch der Vereinigung; "Freunde der Universität Mainz"* (1973), 52-66. Gherardo Gnoli published a book with photos, transcriptions and translations of ten tombstones. See Gherardo Gnoli, *Le iscrizioni giudeo-persiane del Ġūr (Afghanistan), Serie Orientale Roma, 3* (Rome: IsMEO, 1964). More recently see Shaul Shaked, "New Data on the Jews of Afghanistan in the Medieval Period" (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim* (1999) 79: 5-14; "New Early Judeo-Persian Finds," *Ira-no-Judaica* (2008) 6: 222-252. A Jewish magic text derived from Afghanistan possibly from the same period was published in Shaked, "A Jewish

Aramaic Amulet from Afghanistan," *With Wisdom as a Robe, Qumran and Jewish Studies in Honour of Ida Fröhlich*, eds. K.D. Dobos and M. Köszeghy (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2009), 485-494. See also "Classification of Linguistic Features in Early Judeo-Persian texts." In *Exigisti monumenta. Festschrift in Honour of Nicholas Sims-Williams*, eds. A. Hintze, F. De Blois and W. Sundermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 449-461; "A Note on 'Hebrew-Script Tombstones from Jam, Afghanistan'," *Journal of Jewish Studies* (2010) 61:305-307. The tombstones are full of Hebrew and Aramaic words and phrases, but their underlying language is without doubt Judeo-Persian. See also "Persian-Arabic Bilingualism in the Cairo Genizah Documents," *From a Sacred Source: Genizah Studies in Honour of Professor Sefan C. Reif*, eds. B. Outhwaite and S. Bhayro, 319-330 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

³Shaked, "Epigraphica Judaeo-Iranica," in I. Ben Ami and N.A. Stillman and S. Morag, eds., *Studies in Judaism and Islam presented to S.D. Goitein* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1981), 65-81.

It is noteworthy that the cemetery was used during the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, and was not used long after the time of the Mongol invasion of Iran about 1220 CE.

Other sources of information that document the existence of Jewish communities in the extreme north-east of the Iranian domains also exist. At the beginning of the twentieth century the British archaeologist and explorer Sir Aurel Stein discovered a sheet in the ruins of Dandan Uiliq, of which only half the length was preserved. It contained a commercial letter in Persian written in Hebrew characters, and was dated to the eighth century CE. This chronology seems to align with the linguistic features of the text. During the same period very brief rock engravings published by W.B. Henning were discovered. They were written in Hebrew characters in Tang i Aza in Afghanistan. The inscriptions are not very informative, containing a few pious formulae and the names of the authors. These may even have been signs left by passers-by along the road who left their names on the stone. Similar inscriptions were found later on rocks in Afghanistan, and published by Nicholas Sims-Williams.

In recent years a few inscribed objects came to light, presumably from the same area. An elongated thin bronze bar, which may have been used as a Torah pointer, which marks the place in the scroll of the Torah during the oral recitation in the synagogue is the most interesting case. I am now however inclined to a different interpretation to that given in previous publications. The purpose of the object is stated in the inscription to be, somewhat obscurely, “the peg on the bolt of the door” (*ze xar bar lab-i dar*), perhaps meaning the bar that holds the two rings of a door together assuring that it would not open. The door in question may be that of the synagogue, or that of a chest holding such precious objects as the holy scrolls of the Pentateuch. The maker of the object is said to be David ben Moshe, who is described as *zargar* or “goldsmith”.⁴

Another group of manuscripts, which I believe is related to the presence of Jewish communities in Khorasan is the existence of a community of Jews in Kai-Feng, in Eastern China, probably from about the tenth or eleventh century. The language used by members of this community was Persian. Several books used by them during holiday rituals have survived, in particular the text, or Haggadah, used for the Passover evening meal. The text of the Haggadah is in Hebrew and Aramaic, but

⁴The original publications of the object are: S. Shaked and Ruth Jacoby, “An Early Torah Pointer from Afghanistan,” *Ars Judaica* (2005) 1:147-152; Shaked (2008). I am now inclined to give the object a different interpretation. *ze* is apparently the Hebrew word “this”; *xar* is used in the sense of “peg”; see the expression *خرطنبور* “the peg of a lute”, *Farhang-e Ānandrāj*. See also Muhammad Pādšāh, *Farhang-e Ānandrāj*. 7 vols. (Tehran: Khayyam, 1336), 2: 1635b.

the short instructions and the colophons are written in Judaeo-Persian. The type of language used is very close to the language of Khorasan around the time in which the new manuscripts found in Afghanistan were written. The community of Kai Feng survived close to a thousand years, and some people still claim descent from this community, even today. In the course of the centuries, knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic and Persian dwindled, and Chinese became the main language of the community. This has to do with the intermarriage of members of the Jewish families with local Chinese women: it may be assumed that the original settlers were mostly single men who came to China in order to engage in the lucrative international trade, as was the pattern of settlement of Jewish traders when they ventured into remote countries. Another phenomenon of such travel is available thanks to the discovery of many letters and documents in the Cairo Geniza, published by S.D. Goitein and M.A. Friedman. From these documents it is possible to reconstruct much of the history of the Jewish merchants who were active in the Indian trade.

Finally, we should mention the literary and historical references to prominent Jewish writers who took part in the intellectual life of the period between the ninth and eleventh centuries. One of them is known as Hiwi ha-Balkhi, who, as his name shows, may have lived in Balkh (his opponents distorted his name to Kalbi, which has a pejorative association in Hebrew). His lost book dealt with the Hebrew Bible, and listed many contradictions and unlikely statements in the biblical text.

Although the work has not survived, its contents are known thanks to the refutation written by one of the greatest names in Babylonia in the tenth century, Rav Saadia Gaon. This was also the period when the Karaite movement was active. It created a schismatic debate in many Jewish communities, mostly in the east, rejecting the authority of the Talmud and preaching an independent interpretation of the tenets of Judaism on the basis of the study of the Hebrew scriptures. A large number of the early proponents of this group originated from the Persian-speaking area; some of the names include Benjamin Nihavandi and Daniel Qumisi. The Cairo Geniza preserved some of their writings in Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian, the latter from Jerusalem, where a substantial Karaite community gathered and many of its members spoke Persian.

The new find also sheds new light on a Jewish community in the Ghaznavid period, and may add to our knowledge of the intellectual, social and economic life in Khorasan. This period of history was fraught with changes and events, where several religious movements sprang up in this region and during which Jewish life

was also subject to schismatic upheavals.⁵ We are still at an initial stage of the study of these documents, but the initial impression one gets from these documents is that they represent a ‘normal’ orthodox Jewish community: they possessed books of biblical exegesis and prayer books, they read and composed poetry in Hebrew and Judeo-Persian, they also used books discussing questions of religious doctrine. Some of these works may have been composed by members of this community. The books as a rule do not carry names of authors. What we have is mostly unconnected pages from books, lacking beginnings or endings.

Some specific characteristics of this community as far as their intellectual interests are concerned may be mentioned. Among the Jewish sources used there is a great deal of biblical material, but not much that concerns the Talmud, while in other localities the Talmud was at this period a major object of study.⁶ They used and evidently enjoyed poetry in Hebrew, and composed pieces of poetry in Judeo-Persian. The owners of this collection of documents could read compositions written in a wide variety of languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Persian, and could cope with written documents using two scripts, Hebrew and Arabic. When we say “they”, it does not necessarily mean that everybody could. We have no way of knowing how many members of the community were literate, and how many among those who were, could read both scripts. Since we have pieces of writing employing the two scripts, we may take it that at least the members of the family whose papers have now been discovered could understand the four languages and the two types of writing. Hebrew and Aramaic had already been fused to an extent through traditional Jewish usage, but being able to understand them would certainly imply a high degree of education.

Changing scripts in the same document is quite frequently confirmed in the new Khorasan documents. This comes about most commonly in Judeo-Persian letters, where the writer switches over from the Hebrew alphabet to the Arabic script, more particularly when he quotes stock phrases of greeting, good wishes, or hope. Phrases like *ان شاء الله* (*in šā’ a llāh*) “God willing”, or *والحمد لله حق حمده* (*wa-l-ḥamd lillāh ḥaqqā ḥamdihī*) “praise be to God as much as He deserves”, tend to be written in Arabic script, perhaps because they were felt to be non-Jewish but rather Muslim, and thus the Arabic alphabet was deemed to be more appropriate.⁷ The address of a

⁵Further on this below.

⁶Only one small fragment of a Mishna was found among these fragments.

⁷On this phenomenon in documents from the

Cairo Geniza, where it is less frequently attested than in the newly discovered letters from Khorasan; see Shaked (2011), 675.

letter in Judeo-Persian was as a rule written in the Arabic script (sometimes in addition to the address being written in the Hebrew script) on the outside. The reason for this is surely the fact that the carriers of the letters were not always Jews and could not be expected to be able to read the Hebrew alphabet. The two alphabets appear to be written by the same hand. This duplication of scripts in the address formula reveals, incidentally, that some of the persons used one name in the Hebrew-script version and another one in the Arabic script. Thus, the name of one of the main persons in the correspondence alternates: Abū Naṣr Judah ben Daniel in Hebrew, and Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn Dāniyāl in the Arabic script.⁸

The fact that there is a fair amount of writing in Arabic in the Khorasan cache of documents raises the question whether members of the Jewish community in Khorasan would be normally expected to be fluent in Arabic. It does not seem likely that this was the case, for the language currently used by most inhabitants in Khorasan was no doubt Persian. Muslims would be taught Arabic as part of their education, and the learned Muslim Persian authors would usually write their books in Arabic,⁹ but could that apply also to Jews? Jews grew up using their own religious languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, in the synagogue, and no doubt spoke mostly Persian, but it must be assumed that they only seldom had recourse to Arabic as language of oral or written communication. If some of them studied Arabic, this may be a sign of close relations with Muslim neighbors. Would that also include reading books in both in Arabic and in Judeo-Arabic?

Another explanation is probably necessary in order to understand how in our documents there are so many documents in Arabic and Judeo-Arabic. One possibility that comes to mind is that the community, or at least the families whose papers were deposited in this hoard, had come to Khorasan from an Arabic-speaking country, possibly from Iraq. This may explain the fact that the writings of Rav Saadia Gaon were part of their library. If the papers found in this hoard are typical of the library of this community, one may venture to guess that the community (or this particular family) was established in Khorasan by merchants who had come from Baghdad or thereabout just a few centuries before. They probably maintained their contacts with their place of origin and continued to read Judeo-Arabic. This seems to be the best way to account for the presence of several Arabic and Judeo-Arabic books in their

⁸Ofir Haim, details in the Master's thesis, Hebrew University, 2014.

⁹Sometimes interspersed with Persian, as done by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in his autobiographi-

cal account, "Baḏ'u l-ša'n," *Kitāb khatmi l-awli-yā'* (Beirut: Al-Matb'ah al-Kathulikiyah, 1965), 677: 13-32.

library. The fact that most fragments are written in the local form of Judeo-Persian appears to demonstrate, on the other hand, that these families had been resident in Khorasan long enough for them to become Persian-speakers.

As for the intellectual and religious profile of these Jews, they do not differ much from other urban Jewish communities of the time. They were pious and they professed to observe the Jewish religious prescriptions. In one letter, a man who writes to his elder brother defends himself against accusations that he was lax in observing the Sabbath. Such an accusation demonstrates that there were Jews around who were suspected of being not very scrupulous in their observance, but the tone of the letter suggests that this was considered a grave offence.

Members of this family seem to have an intellectual bent. They studied books discussing theological, exegetical or grammatical questions, or containing prescriptions for right conduct, and were interested in astrology, among other matters. As may be expected in this region, the community appears to have included a number of Karaites, members of a dissident Jewish sect founded in Baghdad about the eighth century CE,¹⁰ to judge from some fragments in this collection of papers. Khorasan and its environs was indeed a hotbed of sectarian groups at this time, among Muslims and Jews.¹¹ The collection of papers includes also some fragments from Saadia Gaon's attack on a work written by Hiwi (or Hayyohi) ha-Balkhi, a Jewish free-thinker from the city of Balkh, whose name was previously mentioned. Saadia's polemical work was written in rhymed Hebrew, and large portions of it were discovered about a hundred years ago in the Cairo Geniza collections. Some of the present fragments correspond to the text already known, and others contain new material.

It may appropriate to give some examples of newly found texts in the Khorasan material. A noteworthy poetical composition among these documents is a dirge in Judeo-Persian on the death of a prominent member of the community, Išḥāq b. Yūsuf Bā Sa'īd, which ends with praise for his son, Bū Manšūr, who appears to have

¹⁰It is well known that some of the prominent leaders of the Karaite movement came from the Persian speaking regions; see Moshe Gil, in *the Kingdom of Ishamael* (In Hebrew), 4 vols, *Diaspora Research Institute*, 117 (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House), (1997)1: 264-265; Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 634-1099 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 619-622; see also Shaked, *Irano-Judai-*

ca: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture Throughout the Ages (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1982).

¹¹See Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

become the current head of the community in his father's place. A few verses may be quoted from this poem:

Just as soon as you came in(to the world) you are going out of here. Perhaps you know¹² that this permanent cave has become for you a memorial.¹³

...

Where is our ancestor Adam? Where is Seth, and Noah son of Lamech, the one who has seen so many years of life?

Or where is Idrīs, Hūd and Šāliḥ, of the people of Thamūd, who were killed like the she-camel by the hand of their people?¹⁴

Or where did the blessed Abraham go, the one chosen by the Lord, who was (cast) in the air by the catapult of Urfa¹⁵ (and) got into the fire?

Or where are Ezekiel, Isaiah? Or where is Jeremiah, at the time that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it¹⁶ (by) wars.

Or where are Lot and Shu'ayb, and Daniel, who by the blessing of the stars and (divine) decree, had many children. (?)

Or where is David the Prophet, the caliph of the one Lord, the one who had countless wars with Goliath?

Where is prophet Solomon, that renowned and blessed ..., the prophet who became, by his kingship and (divine) decree, ruler of the world?

Or where is Moses, the interlocutor of God, the blessed prophet? Observe: he had so many talks with God!¹⁷

These are a few verses from a poem of fifty stanzas, and they may convey a taste of this remarkable piece of poetry.¹⁸ The quotation may serve to illustrate some of the features of this language. The language of this piece is close to Classical Persian, and yet it preserves certain elements that are no longer attested in the classical compositions of the tenth and later centuries. Among them is the distinction between the three forms of the relative and interrogative pronoun. Instead of *ke* in Standard Literary Persian there are three pronouns: *k(i)* "who", *ka* "when", and *ku (kū)* "where",

¹²The translation of this phrase is uncertain.

¹³Dirge, verse 1.

¹⁴This is an allusion to a story that comes up in the Koran more than once (Hūd 64; al-A'rāf 73; Šu'arā' 155) recounting a miracle that happened to the prophet Šāliḥ, who had a she-camel miraculously produced from a rock.

¹⁵Urha or Orhay, ancient Edessa, is traditionally regarded as the place of origin of the Prophet

Abraham; see also Ben Zion Judah Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 1-5.

¹⁶i.e. destroyed Jerusalem?

¹⁷Dirge, verses 11-18

¹⁸The typical meter unit being — — — —, usually repeated four times, with a shorter unit at the end of the second hemistich. There are however several deviations from this pattern.

the latter alternating with the well-attested *kujā*. These verses also demonstrate the use of the *ezāfe* particle as a relative pronoun, marked by a *y* standing on its own, in the verse: *yā kujā lūt u šuʿayb i pāfrīn / k-az nujūm u hukm ūrā kōtak-hā bisyār šud* “Or where are Lot and Shuʿayb who by the blessing / derived from the stars and the (divine) decree had got many children (?)”.

The same verse also preserves the archaic form of the preposition *pa* (Middle Persian *pad*) [in *p-āfrīn*], which at the time when this piece of poetry was composed had already been replaced in Classical Persian by *ba/bi*.¹⁹ Other distinctive features of this dialect are not easy to point out and discuss unless one looks at the original orthography in Hebrew characters.²⁰ To quote just one example, in the first verse quoted there is a play on words: *magar be magar dān k-īn maḡār-i dāʿim tu-rā yād-dār šud* “Perhaps, but perhaps, know: this permanent cave has become for you a memorial”. *magar* and *maḡār* have a similar sound, and are written in identical manner in the Hebrew script, but not in the standard Arabic script.

Besides these linguistic and orthographic points, the verses quoted also exemplify a somewhat rare phenomenon in Jewish-Islamic relations. The Jewish poet refers to illustrious people from the past as forerunners of the greatness of the deceased, among them kings and prophets. They are all dead, just like Ishāq b. Yūsuf Bā Saʿīd, the subject of this elegy. Some of the personalities mentioned are evoked from the Jewish tradition, but several are clearly recalled by their Islamic name and attributes. Ezekiel and Jeremiah are not figures of the Islamic tradition; but David and Solomon, who are mentioned in the Koran, are mentioned here as “prophets”, just as they are in the Muslim tradition, whereas Jewish sources consistently call them “kings”. In addition, some non-biblical persons, who belong exclusively to the Qurʾanic tradition, like Hūd, Šāliḥ and the people of Thamūd, rub shoulders here with the Old Testament figures. This is a degree of Jewish-Muslim syncretism that is rarely attested in Jewish writings in Iran or elsewhere.

It is clear from this dirge that the deceased and the author of the poem were synagogue attendees who observed the Jewish holidays as did the rest of the community. The fusion of Jewish and Islamic motifs in this dirge seems to suggest that this is a

¹⁹The meter seems to require a pronunciation *pā-ferīn*. The second hemistich does not conform to the meter.

²⁰This is not the place to go into a close analysis of the Judeo-Persian language of this piece, a task that will have to wait until a proper publi-

cation is feasible.

²¹For the forms occurring in dialects other than Khorasan, see the table in Shaked, (2009b), 451-453. See also Ludwig Paul, *A Grammar of Early Judeo-Persian* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2013).

Jewish community living in close physical and intellectual proximity to its Muslim neighbours. The religious differences do not appear to have caused undue friction.

A few words may be said on the type of Persian language that is characteristic of these texts. We can now distinguish some five different regional varieties in Early Judeo-Persian texts: Khuzistan, Fars, the Bukhara region, Khorasan, and the area of Chinese Turkestan (or more specifically Dandan Uiliq). Some of the most prominent forms typical of each region will be given as examples. The third person singular of the past form of the verb “to do” is *kird* in Khuzistan and Fars, and is *kard* in the other regions, including Khorasan. The verbal form for the copula “is”, can be interpreted as *hist* in Khuzistan and Fars, but it reads *hast* in the other regions. The morpheme of plural nouns, is in Khuzistan mostly the suffix *-hā*, in Fars the suffixes are *-īhā* in a word like *ranjīhā*, but *-ān* in *rōzān u šabān*; Bukhara has mostly *-īhā*; and Khorasan *-hā*, e.g. *rūzhā*. The preposition which in SNP is *ba-*, occurs in the Khorasan documents in the form *pa*, written separately, or *p-*, joined to the following noun, or *pad-* joined to a pronoun like *padān*, essentially as in the other EJP dialects. The form of the verb which in SNP is *buvad* “he/she/it is”, occurs in the Khorasan dialects at least occasionally spelled **bhwd**, i.e. *bahod*, reminiscent of the Pazand spelling of this form. It is reminiscent of the regular form in Pazand, and may be attributed to Sistan.²¹

An important feature of the Khorasan documents is the relative abundance of private letters and legal deeds, where the language is less formal and the style is often rather free. Some of these letters convey a sense of the everyday life conducted by the members of the community and their relationship with their Muslim neighbours and associates. One letter, written to Abu I-Hasan Siman-Tov ben Yehuda, a man who is addressed as “my brother”, as a term of endearment (or because the writer and the recipient are related), starts as follows:

1. A thousand greetings to the dear brother Abū al-Ḥasan Siman-Tov ben Yehuda, may he have long life, and may God grant him life. May the praise and blessing of God
2. grow upon your body and soul, under submission to the God of Israel, and (attaining) your desire and that of (your) loved ones, amen. The letter of the dear brother, may God grant him life, has arrived,
3. I read (it), (and) was pleased with the information about his good health, may God grant good news. Also, I inform (my) dear brother

²²A deceitful transaction was probably a dishonest sale.

4. that all these letters (which) were written (claiming) that I had made a deceitful transaction²² and acted dishonestly,
5. all of these are (false) claims. It is not necessary to speak so harshly. If I affected a transaction, my action and my response
6. are with the Merciful One. I did nothing which would not be agreeable to the Merciful One. If a man says that I
7. do not observe the Sabbath, I know that (my) brother is such (a person) who will not punish his kinsman for that. All these *reproaches*²³
8. are inappropriate for anyone to make. I did nothing which goes against people.²⁴ If I brought my family here,
9. know that I make good (use) of my power. If she (?)²⁵ says that she has a complaint about a certain thing, so that
10. I should repair (the cause of) her complaint, you might say that we made this affair so that (our) love should be
11. greater. If your love to me decreases, my love to you increases to the (utmost) limit.
12. And you know—but you should know this much—that anyone who [takes a] wife,
13. does it for his own comfort, as do all the people (in the world), not so that I
14. should sit in Ghazni and she in Bamian. If I could²⁶ (?) move (?) to Bamian,
15. I would undoubtedly fulfil your desire. And also, if there was not the amount of tithes²⁷ and gifts
16. that should be given to people, I would have come there right away.

Work on the new fragments has not yet begun in earnest. They are held in private hands, and their owners do not favour a publication of the texts. It is important and urgent to have this collection placed in a public institution, where scholars would be given free access to them. Many of the fragments are still in good condition, but some have deteriorated badly and need restoration and conservation work. One very large book, beautifully bound in an embossed leather cover, is so brittle that whenever one tries to open it, the paper breaks and is shredded into myriad tiny pieces. It contains, written in careful scribal hand, a Judeo-Persian *tafsīr* of the Bible, but its state of conservation makes it impossible to be more specific at this stage. The situation of this book may serve as a sad admonition to the possible fate of the other pieces.

²³Italics indicates that in the original the word is written in the Arabic script.

²⁴Or perhaps: which contravenes people's proper behaviour.

²⁵It is assumed that his wife is meant. Persian

does not indicate the gender.

²⁶The text has unaccountably “not”.

²⁷עֲקִיָּל is an imāla form of *iqāl*.



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