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JUDAEO-ARABIC TRANSLATIONS FROM THE BIBLE TO ROBINSON CRUSOE: CENTRE VERSUS PERIPHERY*

Ofra Tirosh-Becker

The translation of prominent Hebrew texts into a local Jewish language, whether Yiddish, Ladino, Judaeo-Arabic, Judaeo-Italian, or any other variety, is a trait shared by Jewish communities around the globe. These translations were essential to prepare the younger generation for participating in Jewish communal life and were invaluable in making Jewish tradition and teachings accessible throughout the community. The corpus of translated texts was typically shared among many communities and encompassed translations of the Torah and a few additional biblical books (such as Psalms and the scrolls of Ruth and Esther), the Passover *Haggada*, the moral teachings of the Mishna, and *piyyuṭ Mi Khamokha* by Rabbi Judah Halevi. Beyond this basic corpus, some communities extended their translation corpus to include additional religious texts, such as translations of liturgical poems known as *hoshaʿnot* and *seliḥot*. Some may have reflected local translation traditions, possibly stemming from earlier common

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translations, while others resulted from the initiative of individual rabbis, who produced *de novo* translations.

The community's translation corpus was orally transmitted through the generations from father to son and from teacher to disciple. With time, some of these translations were preserved in manuscripts and some appeared in printed books, while others remained only in the memory of the community's elders. Fortunately, a few of these oral traditions were recorded by researchers, keenly aware that these traditions were fated to fall into oblivion, as the younger generations no longer speak these languages.

The present paper discusses Judaeo-Arabic translations in North Africa from the fifteenth century through the early twentieth century. Following a review of earlier Judaeo-Arabic translations, we offer the theoretical framework of 'Centre versus Periphery' to better understand the evolution of the Maghrebi translations and examine how migration affects translation traditions. Subsequently, we discuss North African Bible translations, known as *shurūḥ* (singular, *sharḥ*, literally 'commentary'), *sharḥ* translations of post-biblical texts, and, finally, Judaeo-Arabic translations of Modern European literature.

1.0. Judaeo-Arabic Translations

1.1. Pre-Saadian Translations

Judaeo-Arabic translations have a long history, dating back to the first millennium. Early Judaeo-Arabic translations of parts of the Bible were composed around the eighth and ninth centuries CE and are preserved in Geniza fragments. These consisted of a

phonetic transcription of Arabic into Hebrew script that does not rely on Classical Arabic spelling (Blau 1992; Tobi 1993; 1996; Blau and Hopkins 2007; Vollandt 2015, 75–80). These early translations were literal in nature, most likely reflecting oral traditions. They are commonly known as 'pre-Saadian', as they were composed before Saʿadya Gaon's *Tafsīr*.

1.2. Saʿadya Gaon's *Tafsīr*

The most famous early Judaeo-Arabic translation of the Bible is Rav Saʿadya Gaon's (882–942) monumental translation known as the *Tafsīr* (Steiner 2011; Brody 2013; Ben-Shammai 2015), composed in medieval Judaeo-Arabic (Blau 1999; 2001).[1] Rav Saʿadya Gaon's *Tafsīr* broadly adheres to Classical Arabic syntax and does not follow the word order of the Hebrew text, in marked contrast to the Aramaic of Targum Onqelos of the Torah and the later Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations discussed below. Because medieval Judaeo-Arabic was a common scholarly vehicle that enabled Jewish intellectuals across the Islamic world to communicate and exchange knowledge, it had relatively few dialectal elements. Texts written in medieval Judaeo-Arabic were typically unvocalised, thus enabling readers to read them with their own pronunciation in mind.

[1] Blau refers to this variety as 'post-classical Arabic' (Blau 1998, 115–16). On the ambiguity of this term in an Islamicate/Arabic context see Bauer (2007).

1.3. Adaptations of the *Tafsīr*

In subsequent centuries, Rav Saʿadya Gaon's translation acquired sacred status, and manuscript copies of it were available in Jewish communities throughout the Islamic world. However, with time the *Tafsīr's* language became less intelligible, as local Judaeo-Arabic varieties became more colloquial. In particular, the Arabic syntax adhered to in the *Tafsīr* was no longer shared with the dialects of these later audiences. Hence, 'adaptations' of Saʿadya's *Tafsīr* were created to address this growing concern. Some of these are preserved in manuscripts (Avishur 2001, 84–105).

1.4. *Al-Sharḥ al-Sūsānī*

In the sixteenth century, Issachar ben Sūsān ha-Maʿaravi, who immigrated from Fes (Morocco) to Safed (Eretz Israel), composed his *Al-Sharḥ al-Sūsāni,* a Judaeo-Arabic translation of the entire Hebrew Bible, as well as the *hafṭarot* and the Scroll of Antiochus. In the introduction to his *Sharḥ*, he explains that Saʿadya Gaon's excellent *Tafsīr* could no longer be understood even by scholars of his time. Therefore, he believed that a literal translation following Hebrew syntax would be the best way to ensure understanding of the biblical text for future generations.

Ben Sūsān's translation was, therefore, literal, with barely any deviation from the Hebrew text. Consequently, he created an *artificial language* with a syntax foreign to that of spoken Arabic. Reflecting the author's personal history, the language of *Al-Sharḥ al-Sūsāni* is a mixture of Maghrebi and Eastern Arabic dialects. It also retains a significant number of phrases from Saʿadya's *Tafsīr*.

He added exegesis on words and specific phrases (*bayān*), which include, for example, synonyms in various Arabic dialects "so that each individual may understand it and read it in the Arabic of his area, if he so wills." Despite his intentions, this translation did not achieve widespread circulation (Doron 1985).

2.0. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Centre versus Periphery

Since the fifteenth century, additional Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations evolved across the Muslim world, reflecting local translation traditions that aim to enhance the intelligibility of the ancient text by bringing the translation somewhat closer to the local vernaculars. The processes that shaped the evolution of these North African Judaeo-Arabic translation traditions can be explained using a theoretical framework that highlights the distinction between cultural centre(s) and periphery. In some fields, such as economics or political science, this question is well framed, as one can empirically quantify economic activity or identify the official seat of government. However, the question of centre(s) versus periphery is more ambiguous in culture studies, where it is often difficult to determine one or the other, leading to controversy around cultural appropriation, globalisation, and Europocentric historiography (Kaps and Komlosy 2013). In the present paper, the discussion of centre(s) and periphery will be limited to the domain of Jewish communities within North Africa itself, avoiding the broader controversy.

The question of which North African Jewish communities were cultural centres and which were periphery is not as straightforward as it may seem. For example, in Algeria, the bustling capital Algiers was an important political and cultural centre for French-occupied Algeria, making the more isolated landlocked city of Constantine in Eastern Algeria part of the periphery. Or was it? Periphery in what respect? As will be discussed below, by the twentieth century, Constantine had become the centre of the Algerian Judaeo-Arabic culture, after that culture had been brushed aside under the waves of modernity in the capital Algiers. One might claim that only by being on the periphery of French cultural dominance could Constantine become a pinnacle of the region's Judaeo-Arabic culture. In other words, only by being on the *periphery* in one aspect of culture, could it become a *centre* in another aspect of culture. Hence, whether a place is central or a peripheral is not necessarily a question of geography or perspective, but a question of subject matter.

This complexity is well manifested in translation traditions and related customs, where the distinction between centres and periphery is further blurred, as each community may have its own customs and translation traditions. At times we find that even neighbouring synagogues in the same city celebrate different customs relating to their translation corpus. Take for example, the famous liturgical poem (*piyyuṭ*) *Mi Khamokha*, composed in Hebrew by Rabbi Judah Halevi in twelfth-century Spain, which recaps the story of the scroll of Esther. This poem, which was loved by many communities in North Africa (and beyond),

was translated into Judaeo-Arabic and inspired the writing of additional *Mi Khamokha* poems to commemorate local miraculous instances of deliverance. The customs surrounding this poem vary from one community to another. In some, this *piyyuṭ* was recited together with its Judaeo-Arabic translation, while in others only the original Hebrew text was read in the synagogue. In some communities, it was recited on *Shabbat Zakhor*, the Sabbath that precedes Purim, while in others it was recited on the day of Purim itself (Tirosh-Becker 2006).

2.2. Migration of Translation Traditions

The distinction between the original oral *sharḥ* traditions and their written manifestation is related to our discussion of cultural centres versus periphery. *Sharḥ* traditions evolved locally. However, when people, especially rabbis, moved to new communities or new countries in search of a job or due to new family ties, they often carried with them the *sharḥ* tradition from their old home, leading to interactions between different *sharḥ* traditions.

A striking example of this migration process is found in the *sharḥ* traditions of the Scroll of Antiochus (*Megillat ʾAntiyokhus*) from Ghardaia (Algeria) (Tirosh-Becker 2015b). The Scroll of Antiochus is a historiographical account of the wars of the Hasmoneans and the origin of the festival of Hanukkah. The original Scroll was written between the second and the fifth centuries and was later translated into many Jewish languages, including Judaeo-Spanish (Yaari 1962, 143) and Judaeo-Arabic. Ghardaia is a remote desert-dwelling community, located in an oasis deep within the Sahara desert, 500km south of Algiers (Tirosh-Becker

2017). In that community, I found two different *sharḥ* traditions for the Scroll of Antiochus. One of these two *shurūḥ* was written in the Judaeo-Arabic dialect of that isolated region, known as the Mzāb.[2] However, the second of these *shurūḥ* was more perplexing, as it exhibited the characteristics of a Moroccan dialect.

So how did a Moroccan translation end up in the Algerian Mzāb? Looking at the map, one sees that Ghardaia is an important oasis on the trade route that crosses the Sahara Desert from Morocco to Tunisia (Stein 2014, 2–3). It is known that the Ghardaian Jewish community was of heterogeneous origins. Some families trace their origins to Djerba (Tunisia), others to Morocco (Ṣabbān 2002, 149, 155; Stein 2014, 3). Some of the rabbis who led the Ghardaian Jewish community in the twentieth century, and possibly even earlier, arrived in the Mzāb from south Moroccan towns such as Demnate and Marrakesh (Ṣabbān 2002, 179; J. Tedghi p.c.). It is likely that the aforementioned Moroccan *sharḥ* arrived in this remote Algerian oasis along these trade and migration routes.

3.0. Modern Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations

The aforementioned *Al-Sharḥ al-Sūsāni* was one of the first Judaeo-Arabic translations of the Bible written in modern Judaeo-Arabic. It was followed by many others, all aiming to bring the

[2] There are limited data on the Judaeo-Arabic dialect of Ghardaia (Tedghi 2010, 5194). However, among its characteristics is the preservation of the distinction between the sibilant consonants *s*, *š*, *z*, *ž* (Tirosh-Becker 2015b, 195). On the Muslim dialect of the Mzāb see Grand'henry (1976).

translation somewhat closer to local vernaculars. These Bible translations, known as *shurūḥ*, were orally transmitted through the generations from teacher to disciple, and from father to son. Only in recent centuries were some of these translation traditions captured in manuscripts or published in printed books, ensuring their preservation for future generations (Tirosh-Becker 1990; Bar-Asher 1999c; 2001; Maman 2000, 48–53; Avishur 2001, 106–11).

Sharḥ traditions were orally transmitted and evolved over time, and the identity of their original authors is largely unknown. In some cases, we know the identity of the rabbis who put their communities' translation traditions into writing. Given the scope and responsibility of such a task, only prominent rabbinic leaders took upon themselves such an endeavour. Examples include Rabbi Raphael Berdugo of Meknes, Morocco (Bar-Asher 2001), Rabbi Avraham Ben-Harush of Tafilalt, south-eastern Morocco (Bar-Asher 2022), Rabbi Yosef Renassia of Constantine, Algeria (§4.1 below), and Rabbi Ḥay Dayyan from Tunisia (Doron 1991).

Rabbi Raphael ben Mordechai Berdugo (1747–1821) was one of the foremost rabbis of his time in all of Morocco, and the most important scholar in the history of the Meknes Jewish community. Berdugo's *sharḥ*, *Leshon Limmudim*, is a brief Judaeo-Arabic translation of (most of) the Bible. This work incorporates earlier orally transmitted *sharḥ* translations from Meknes, which he had modified to harmonise with his contemporary colloquial Arabic. Berdugo added his own translation to biblical books for

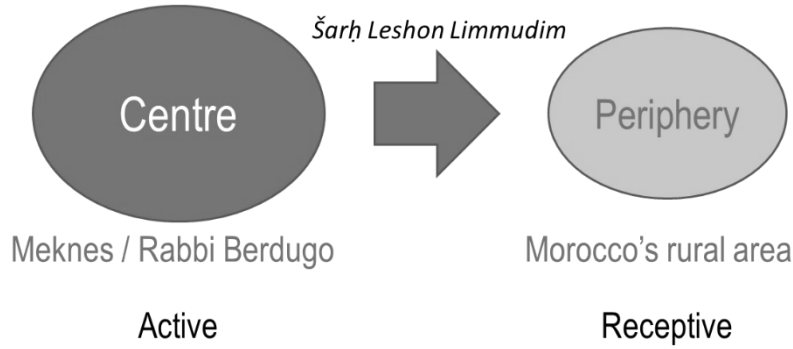
which there was no available oral *sharḥ* tradition (such as the books of the Former Prophets).

It is told in Meknes that Rabbi Raphael Berdugo decided to write this book when he was traveling through Morocco's southern rural areas and found out that the teachers themselves were making mistakes while explaining biblical verses to their students. To ensure that a reliable written translation of the Bible would be available for all, effectively replacing the oral tradition that was prone to errors and mistakes, he composed *Leshon Limmudim* in the local Judaeo-Arabic variety. Indeed, the book *Leshon Limmudim* was copied more frequently than any other book in Morocco (Bar-Asher 2001).

3.1. Centre versus Periphery Model I

The case of *Leshon Limmudim* is an example of the hierarchy between a cultural centre and its periphery. Rabbi Berdugo embodies the concept of a Moroccan cultural centre (Meknes) aiming to educate Moroccan rural communities by standardising a Judaeo-Arabic Bible translation. As seen in Figure 1 (facing page), in this model the centre is the active player, while the periphery has a receptive role. The centre identifies a need in the periphery and responds by providing tools and standards, while the periphery accepts it. We will see a different interaction model as we continue our exploration of North African Judaeo-Arabic translations.

Figure 1: Centre versus Periphery Model I: the case of *sharḥ Leshon Limmudim* by Rabbi Raphael Berdugo of Meknes, Morocco.



3.2. The Language of the *Sharḥ*

The language of the modern *shurūḥ* differs significantly from the medieval Judaeo-Arabic used by Rav Saʿadya Gaon in his *Tafsīr*. The language of the modern *shurūḥ* was forged under the influence of two opposing forces. On the one hand, the goal of the translation is to make the text comprehensible to the local community, leading to the incorporation of vernacular features. On the other hand, the sanctity of the source text—first and foremost the Bible—imposes an elevated style and conservative traits. As a consequence, the language of *sharḥ* traditions is characterised by a mixture of layers (Tirosh-Becker 1990; 2012; Tedghi 1993; Bar-Asher 1999a). It includes conservative Arabic elements, characteristics of medieval Judaeo-Arabic, dialectal features that are no longer used in the daily spoken dialect, as well as local vernacular traits. Naturally, different *shurūḥ* vary in the relative prevalence of conservative components versus vernacular features, reflecting the period in which these translation traditions were formulated. For example, the language of the Moroccan

sharḥ to the Passover *Haggada* is not as elevated as the language of the Moroccan *sharḥ* to the Bible (Bar-Asher 1999b, 185–87). Furthermore, despite the presence of some colloquial features in the language of the *sharḥ,* this language remains significantly elevated even with respect to the language used by the rabbinic elite in their original exegetical compositions and other writings (Tirosh-Becker 2011a).

Common to all modern *shurūḥ* is their adoption of a word-for-word translation method, reflecting the original Hebrew word order, possibly due to the traditional influence of the famous ancient Aramaic translation of the Torah, Targum Onqelos (Bar-Asher 1999c, 27–29). Hence, the syntax of the *sharḥ* reflects the syntax of the original Biblical Hebrew text and not Arabic syntax. Moreover, even the Hebrew definite direct object particle אֶת *ʾet*, which lacks an exact counterpart particle in Arabic syntax, is translated in these *shurūḥ* by the artificial equivalent אילא *ʾila*.[3] For example, consider the following translation from Constantine (Algeria).

(1) וקאמת פ'י וסט אליל וכ'דאת אילא ולדי מן חדאייא
וַתָּקָם בְּתוֹךְ הַלַּיְלָה וַתִּקַּח אֶת־בְּנִי מֵאֶצְלִי
'She arose in the night and took my son from my side'
(1 Kgs 3.20)

Another trait common to many *shurūḥ* that stems from the revered status of the Bible is the presence of archaic and conservative linguistic phenomena that have long disappeared from the spoken dialect. One example is the distinct feminine plural

[3] On the use of *ʾilā* in Egyptian Judaeo-Arabic texts see Hary (1991).

participle form with the suffix *-āt*, e.g., סאכנאת *sāknāt* 'living (in a place)', which exists in Classical Arabic, but is no longer in use in Maghrebi dialects, where the masculine plural form with the suffix *-īn* (e.g., *sāknīn*) denotes both genders (Cohen 1975, 94; Marçais 1977, 80–81). Yet, the Classical Arabic plural feminine form is found in *sharḥ* traditions, such as the *sharḥ* to Psalms and to the *hafṭarot* from Constantine, Algeria (Tirosh-Becker 2012, 418), and the *sharḥ* tradition of Tafilalt, Morocco (Bar-Asher 1999a, 51).

The conservative traits in the language of the *sharḥ* are not limited to vestiges of Classical Arabic, but also include non-classical features that are no longer present in the spoken dialect. An example is the translation of the adverb 'now'. While the Classical Arabic adverb is ʾ*alān* أَلآن and the spoken Judaeo-Arabic adverb in Constantine is *dūqa* (also pronounced *dawqa* or *ḍūqa*), the adverb that appears in the Constantinian *sharḥ* is the older colloquial form דלווק *dəlwaq* and, less frequently, דלווקת *dəlwaqt* (Tirosh-Becker 2012, 419). *Dəlwaq* represents an earlier dialectal form: *haḏa al-waqt* (هٰذَا ٱلْوَقْت) > *dəlwaq* > *dūqa*. Such features were most likely introduced into the language of the *sharḥ* by earlier generations, when its language was in interaction with that spoken vernacular. However, with time the *sharḥ* gained its revered status and became more resistant to change, thus preserving dialectal features that have disappeared from the spoken dialects, which have since evolved. In addition, as discussed above, *sharḥ* traditions were also influenced by the relocation of rabbis from one community to another, adding further complexity to its language by introducing features from other dialects,

e.g., the use of the Tunisian adverb *yāsər* as an alternative translation for *mawǧūd* in the Constantinian *sharḥ*, both denoting 'very, a lot'.

These conservative features are interwoven with colloquial phenomena, such as the dialectal forms *kla* and *xda* for the verbs 'ate' and 'took', respectively, which differ from the Classical Arabic forms أَكَلَ *ʾakala* and أَخَذَ *ʾaxaḏa* and other Maghrebi dialectal forms, e.g., *kal*, *kel* and *xad*, *xed*, respectively (Tirosh-Becker 2021, 268). This creates an intricate combination, unique to this type of text. Despite the penetration of vernacular features, the numerous conservative traits (both classical and non-classical) have led to the perception of the *sharḥ*'s language as elevated, reflecting the revered status of this text.

4.0. Judaeo-Arabic Translations of Post-biblical Texts

Thus far, we have focused on Judaeo-Arabic translations of the Bible, as these are the cornerstone of any and every Jewish translation corpus, be that in Judaeo-Arabic, Ladino, or other Jewish languages. However, translations into Jewish languages, in general, and into North African Judaeo-Arabic, in particular, went far beyond the Bible to encompass other important Jewish texts, such as the Passover *Haggada* (Maman 1999), the moral teachings of Mishna tractate ʾAvot (Bar-Asher 2010, 329–39; Tirosh-Becker 2011a), various liturgical poems known as *piyyuṭim*, e.g., *hoshaʿnot*, *səliḥot*, and *Mi Khamokha* (Tirosh-Becker 2006; 2011c; 2014), the *maḥzor* prayer book (Tedghi 1994), the Scroll of Antiochus (Tirosh-Becker 2015b), and more.

4.1. Rabbi Yosef Renassia's Literary Project

Of special interest is the outstanding Judaeo-Arabic literary project by Rabbi Yosef Renassia of Constantine, Algeria, which is directly linked to the city's unique situation and its evolving role as a cultural centre for Algerian Judaeo-Arabic.

The city of Constantine, the third largest in Algeria, is nested in the eastern region of the Atlas Mountain range, separated from its immediate surroundings by steep cliffs. The Jewish community of Constantine is among the oldest Jewish communities in North Africa. During the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, with the arrival of Jewish immigrants from Spain, this community became one of the most important Jewish communities in the Muslim world. Following the French colonisation in 1830, Constantine became a seat of one of the three French *consistoires* that governed Jewish life in colonial Algeria (the other two being Algiers and Oran). French colonisation of Algeria was completed in 1870, when all Algerian Jews were granted French citizenship according to the Crémieux decree. The colonisation and these political transformations led to the adoption of French as the main language for many Algerian Jews. The increasing influence of French culture and language in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Algeria weakened the status of Judaeo-Arabic and its culture. Namely, not only was the Judaeo-Arabic language pushed aside in favour of French, but older Jewish traditions that were associated with it were also slowly dismissed in favour of French modernity.

As a prominent leader in the Jewish community of Constantine, Rabbi Yosef Renassia (1879–1962) set out to counter

this process. Serving as the director of the *ʿEtz Ḥayim Yeshiva* in Constantine, he believed that the best way to confront the process of erosion of the fabric of Algerian Judaeo-Arabic culture was through Jewish education and by providing a suitable literary corpus. This had set Rabbi Renassia on a literary project to which he dedicated close to five decades, from 1915 to 1960, composing more than a hundred volumes in Judaeo-Arabic, which together form a monumental and unprecedented literary-pedagogical library.

This project gives us an opportunity to take stock of the breadth of the Judaeo-Arabic translation corpus. Among the Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations (*shurūḥ*) published by Rabbi Renassia, often with his own commentaries, we find translations of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, selections from the books of the Prophets, known as the *hafṭarot*, and more. Rabbi Renassia also published fifteen volumes of his Judaeo-Arabic translation and commentary to the Mishna and parts of the Talmud.

Judaeo-Arabic translations and commentaries of liturgical texts were also included in this translation corpus, encompassing the Passover *Haggada*, liturgical poems (*piyyuṭim*)—the *seliḥot* recited in the month of Elul and during the Days of Awe, the *hoshaʿnot* recited during the holiday of Sukkot, and *Mi Khamokha* for *Shabbat Zakhor*, which precedes the holiday of Purim. Significant effort was directed by Rabbi Renassia to translations of classical Jewish texts, including a thirty-volume translation of Maimonides's *Mishne Torah*, a twenty-six-volume translation of *Sefer ha-RIF* by Rabbi Yitzḥak Alfasi of eleventh-century Fes, and a

five-volume translation of Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch.[4] To ensure that his students had the necessary tools for their studies, Rabbi Renassia also prepared several dictionaries and grammar books for them to use (Tirosh-Becker 2015a, 439–46). He prepared Judaeo-Arabic instructions for the customs and laws relating to Jewish holidays, too.

This wide-reaching project—carried out by a single person—was unique in twentieth-century Algeria. However, Rabbi Renassia was not the only Jewish scholar in Constantine who attempted to counter French influence by publishing Judaeo-Arabic translations and commentaries. An earlier attempt, albeit on a more modest scale, was made in the late nineteenth century by Rabbi Shelomo Zarqa, who wrote several Judaeo-Arabic works including a *sharḥ* and a commentary on Psalms (1–89), a commentary on Genesis and Exodus, and a commentary on the Passover *Haggada* and related Jewish laws (Elkayam 1999). In addition, a Judaeo-Arabic translation of Joshua 1–5 was composed by three other Rabbis from Constantine, the Rabbis David ha-Cohen, Shelomo Zerbib, and Tsion Shukrun.

The city's Chief Rabbi, Sidi Fredj Ḥalimi (1876–1957), was renowned throughout Algeria and its surroundings (Charvit 2010). Graduates of the city's yeshiva, *ʿEtz Ḥayim*, who studied with Rabbi Renassia and Rabbi Sidi Fredj Ḥalimi, and whom I had the pleasure of interviewing, testified to the prominence of

[4] For a detailed discussion on Rabbi Renassia's Judaeo-Arabic translation of Rashi's Pentateuch commentary, see Fenton (2006).

these rabbis. Taken together, the efforts of these and other Constantinian rabbis made Constantine a centre for Judaeo-Arabic culture in the first half of the twentieth century.

4.2. Centre versus Periphery Model II

The cultural projects of Rabbi Renassia and other Jewish scholars from Constantine offer a model of the relationship between centre and periphery that differs from the one discussed above (§3.1). This model focuses on the inclination of cultural centres to adopt new trends, leaving room for the periphery to lead in aspects of culture that were cast aside by the original centre.

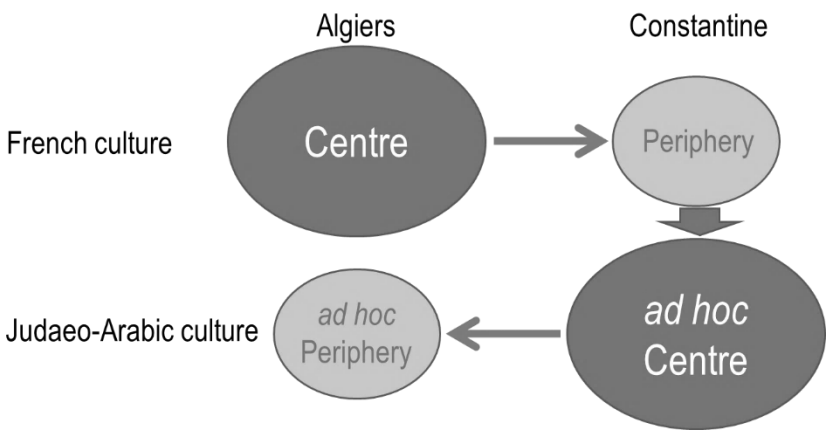
In this case, the Jewish population of the capital city of Algiers—the political, economic, and cultural centre of *French* Algeria in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—readily adopted the French language and modern culture at the expense of their Judaeo-Arabic heritage. Although Algeria was colonised already in 1830, the integration of its Jewish population into French culture intensified following the 1870 Crémieux decree, which granted French citizenship to Algerian Jews, and more so following Jules Ferry's 1882 school reform, which made primary education free and compulsory to French children, including Algerian Jews (Charvit 2011, 105). Nowhere was this integration greater than in the capital city of Algiers, the seat of the French colonial government. As early as 1912, the French dialectologist Marcel Cohen in his seminal book on the Judaeo-Arabic dialect of Algiers noted this cultural transformation, even within the family setting. While the grandparents spoke almost exclusively Judaeo-Arabic, their offspring were bilingual, speaking French

and Judaeo-Arabic alike, and the grandchildren used only French and could barely communicate with their grandparents (Cohen, M. 1912, 10–11). In a 1925 report by Albert Confino, the inspector for the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) education system in Algeria, he testifies to the weakening of Jewish education in the cities of Algiers (and Oran), as kids prefer to go to the movies and play sports rather than attend *Talmude Torah* (Cohen 1995, 107–8).

In contrast, Constantine, while being the third largest city in Algeria, remained removed—geographically and culturally—from this centre of Algerian *French* life. The Constantinian rabbis were more conservative and attempted to fend off the influence of French culture. Albert Confino, the AIU inspector, complained in a 1932 report that teaching in *Talmude Torah* in Constantine was still carried out in Judaeo-Arabic. He also reports that traditional Hebrew texts are translated in these *Talmude Torah* into Judaeo-Arabic (and not French) upon the parents' demands, as that was the only language that they understand (Cohen 1995, 110–11). My interviewees—who studied in Constantine in the first half of the twentieth century—confirmed that in addition to attending French schools, they also studied in traditional *Talmude Torah* twice a week (on Sundays and Thursdays) and during recesses, where they studied in Judaeo-Arabic. Over time, French spread in Constantine as well, but, as described above, it was countered by significant literary and cultural efforts to preserve the older lingual and cultural traditions.

This resulted in the periphery city of Constantine becoming an *ad hoc* centre for Judaeo-Arabic culture, heritage, and literature in the first half of the twentieth century. The periphery thus stepped in to fill a gap left open by the historical centre (i.e., the gap of the abandoned Judaeo-Arabic heritage), promoting Jewish cultural leaders, such as Rabbi Renassia, to embark on far-reaching endeavours to preserve his ancestors' Judaeo-Arabic traditions and language, both inseparable from his Jewish identity. Indeed, we know that Rabbi Renassia's work reached an audience beyond the confines of his city, and that many of his books were offered for sale in Jewish bookstores in Morocco (Fenton 2006, 266). This model of centre versus periphery is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Centre versus Periphery Model II: Constantine as an *ad hoc* centre for Judaeo-Arabic culture in twentieth-century Algeria



The role of Constantine as a centre for Judaeo-Arabic culture was not limited to Rabbi Renassia and his contemporaries. It is also reflected in the realm of Jewish Journalism. In the late nineteenth century, Judaeo-Arabic journalism was wide-spread

in Algeria, with journals such as *Maguid Micharim* published in Oran and *Qol Ha-Tor* published in Algiers. Judaeo-Arabic journals had ceased to appear in Algeria by the turn of the twentieth century in favour of French language journals (Tirosh-Becker 2011b, 130–32). The only Judaeo-Arabic journal published in Algeria in the twentieth century was *əl-Ḥikma*, printed in Constantine in the years 1912–1913 and then again in 1922–1923, under the editorship of Rabbi Avraham Zerbib (1870–1942). From a list published in *əl-Ḥikma's* issue from 16 May 1913 we learn that the journal's circulation extended throughout Algeria. According to this list, the journal could be purchased in all the townships in the District of Constantine in east Algeria (Constantine, Annaba, Batna, El Beïda, Tebessa, Khenchela, Sétif and Biskra), in many towns in the District of Algiers in central Algeria (Algiers, Affreville, Médéa, Miliana, Orléansville, Bougie), as well as in the isolated communities of Ghardaia and Aflou on the edge of the Sahara Desert. Although it was probably not circulated in the western District of Oran, the journal could still be purchased in the town of Sidi Bel Abbès in that district.

5.0. Judaeo-Arabic Translations of Modern Literature

The discussion above focused on Judaeo-Arabic translations of texts within the Jewish cultural sphere. We associated this with efforts to preserve Jewish identity in the first half of the twentieth century in Algeria, where French cultural influence was significant, describing this process in the conceptual framework of centre versus periphery.

However, in other parts of the Maghreb, French influence was not as strong, and Judaeo-Arabic remained an important cultural language for the Jewish population. This may explain why in Tunisia we find Judaeo-Arabic translations of European *belles-lettres* (Tobi and Tobi 2000, 27; Attal 2007, 13 and index). In a sense, this exemplifies the broader influence of the European cultural centres on the colonised North African periphery, irrespective of the intra-Jewish centre versus periphery discussion presented in the previous sections. Not only were these translations the act of a literary elite; they were accepted by the community and read to children. Personal accounts record, for example, that in the 1930s and 1940s, Rabbi Raḥamim Barukh of Tunis would read aloud the Judaeo-Arabic translations of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Robinson Crusoe* to children and adults alike (Y. Baruch, p.c.).

5.1. Translations of French Classics

Most of the European books translated into Judaeo-Arabic were French classics, which are among the core literature of Western culture. These were translated from French into the Tunisian Judaeo-Arabic by local Tunisian scholars. Among the translated books we find:

- Alexandre Dumas's novel *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Fr. *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*) translated into Maghrebi Judaeo-Arabic as אלכונתא די מונתי כריסתו by Jacob Chemla and printed in Tunis 1889 (Uzan u-Castro Imprimeur). The book was well received by the community (Tobi and Tobi

2000, 267), and it was reprinted in Sousse in ca 1940 (Maklouf Nadjar Imprimeur), and in Tunis in 1950 (n.p.).

- Alexandre Dumas's novel *The Three Musketeers* (Fr. *Les Trois Mousquetaires*) translated as חכאית פ'רסאן אלמלך 'The Story of the King's Knights'. The book was translated into Maghrebi Judaeo-Arabic by Shaul Daniel Ḥofni and printed in Tunis in 1910 (al-Maṭbaʿa al-Sharqiya).
- The *Fables of Jean de La Fontaine* translated as כתאב חדית אלחיואן מן קלם אלמואללף אלשהיר אלפארנסאוי "לא פ'ונתין" 'The Book of Discourse among the Animals written by the famous French author La Fontaine', printed in Sousse in ca 1940 (Maklouf Nadjar Imprimeur). The name of the translator is unknown, as it was indicated only by his initials מ.כ ותעריב אלכאתב 'translated by the writer M.K.'.
- Marie-Joseph Eugène Sue's novel *The Mysteries of Paris* (Fr. *Les Mystères de Paris*) translated by Ḥay Sitruk as כתאב מסתירי פאריז (Tobi and Tobi 2000, 261) and published in Tunis in 1889 (Uzan u-Castro Imprimeur).

5.2. Translation of English Books

A couple of English books were also translated into Judaeo-Arabic and printed in Tunis:

- Of special interest is the Maghrebi Judaeo-Arabic translation of the famous English novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, translated into Judaeo-Arabic by Ḥay Sitruk as חכאית רובינסון כרוסוי and published in Tunis, most likely in the first decade of the twentieth century, and in Sousse in ca 1940. Unlike the other novels, which were written in

French, *Robinson Crusoe* is an English language novel, a language that had only a limited presence in North Africa. *Robinson Crusoe* was well-received worldwide and is often regarded as the first English novel. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had been published in hundreds of editions, spin-offs, and translations (Watt 1951, 95). It was also translated into several Jewish languages and Hebrew. It is possible that the Maghrebi Judaeo-Arabic translation of this novel was not made from the original English version, but was based on either the French or Hebrew translations of this work.

- Another English book, *The Red Eagle* by James Dewdson (דיודסון), was translated into Maghrebi Judaeo-Arabic as אלנסר אלאחמר by Yaakov Hacohen and printed as a 596-page book in Tunis in 1908 (al-Maṭbaʿa al-Sharqiya printer). According to Attal, the author's name appears on the last page as ג'אמיס דיודסון (Tobi and Tobi 2000, 274; Attal 2007, 107). I was not able to identify the original book.

5.3. Translation of Hebrew *Haskala* Novels

Maghrebi Judaeo-Arabic translations of seminal Hebrew novels of the Jewish Enlightenment movement (*Haskala*) were also published. These are Avraham Mapu's novels אהבת ציון 'The Love of Zion', the first modern novel written in Hebrew, and אשמת שומרון 'The Blame of Samaria' (Tobi and Tobi 2000, 22; Attal 2007, 13–14). Their Judaeo-Arabic translations were published in Tunisia

in the same period as the translations of the above French and English novels.

- Two independent translations of the book אהבת ציון 'The Love of Zion' were published in Tunisia. The first Judaeo-Arabic translation by Zemaḥ ben Natan ha-Levi was published as אהבת ציון או חכאית אמנון ותמר 'The Love of Zion or the Story of Amnon and Tamar' in Tunis, ca 1890 (Imprimerie Internationale). The second Judaeo-Arabic translation, by Messaoud Maarek, under the pseudonym Ben-Amitai, was published as כתאב אלחב ואלוטן 'The Book of Love and Homeland' in Tunis in 1890 (Uzan u-Castro Imprimeur), re-published in Sousse 1943 (Maklouf Nadjar Imprimeur).
- A Judaeo-Arabic translation of אשמת ציון 'The Blame of Samaria' by Isaac Mamou of Nabeul was published as בין יהודה ואפרים דנוב וג'ראים או אשמת שומרון 'Between Judea and Ephraim Sins and Offenses or The Blame of Samaria' in Tunis (n.d.; Imprimerie de l'Orient [Uzan]).
- A translation of Mapu's novel עייט צבוע 'Hypocrite Eagle' was also translated into Judaeo-Arabic by Isaac Mamou of Nabeul, but this translation was never published and is found in manuscript only (Attal 2007, 14).

5.4. Translated Serial Novels in Journals

Another avenue for the Judaeo-Arabic translation and distribution of fiction was serial novels in North African Judaeo-Arabic journals. This was a widespread practice in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries worldwide, famous examples including

The Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (Law 2000). Notably, some of the French novels mentioned above—Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers* and Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris*—were also originally published as serial stories in French journals (known as *feuilleton*).

Not surprisingly, this practice was adopted in Judaeo-Arabic journals published in the same period in North Africa (both monolingual Judaeo-Arabic and bilingual Judaeo-Arabic/French journals), which also published many serial Judaeo-Arabic works (Attal 2007, 174–80). Some of these were serial Judaeo-Arabic translations of modern literature:

- *The Mysteries of Paris*, published in the journal אלתיליגראף *al-Telegraph* (n.d.);
- *The Red Eagle*, published in the journal אלצבאח *al-Ṣabāḥ* (1907–1908[?]);
- *The Love of Zion*, published in the journal אלבסתאן *al-Bustān* (1890) and later in אלנג'מה *Al-Naǧma* in 1942;
- *The Blame of Samaria*, published in the journal אליהודי *al-Yahūdi* (1938).

Judaeo-Arabic translations of stories and articles from Hebrew journals in Eretz Israel were also published in Tunisia and Algeria. One example is the Judaeo-Arabic translation of the Hebrew language eulogies read during Eliezer Ben-Yehuda's funeral on 16 December 1922. These eulogies were published in the Constantinian Judaeo-Arabic journal *əl-Ḥikma*, translated from the original Hebrew text that appeared in the Jerusalem-based journal *Do'ar Ha-Yom* (Tirosh-Becker 2015a). Some Hebrew stories

and articles, which originally appeared in Hebrew journals, were later translated into Judaeo-Arabic, and published as short booklets. For example, the *Story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon* published by Nahum Slouschz in the New York Hebrew journal *Ha-Toren* was translated into Tunisian Judaeo-Arabic and printed as a 32-page booklet in Tunis in 1921 (translator unknown). This story was reprinted in Sousse, c. 1943 (Attal 2007, 138–39). Another example is the relatively free Judaeo-Arabic translation of Sarah Gluzman's story *My Moshe'le*. The original story was published in 1947 in the Hebrew journal *Ha-Do'ar*, and its translation was published in Djerba a year later, in 1948 (Henshke 2006).

6.0. Summary

In this paper, we have charted the evolution of Judaeo-Arabic translations from the early pre-Saadian translations, through the tenth-century Rav Saadia Gaon's *Tafsīr,* which was written in medieval Judaeo-Arabic, to the North African *shurūḥ* written in modern Judaeo-Arabic. This translation corpus encompasses Bible translations as well as translations of liturgical and religious Jewish texts. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Judaeo-Arabic translations of modern secular French, English, and Hebrew novels were also introduced.

Two models for the complex interaction between centre and periphery in the context of North African Judaeo-Arabic translations became evident through the discussion of these translations. In the first model, the centre is superior to the periphery, it identifies a need in the periphery and responds by

providing tools and standards, while the periphery is receptive to adopting it. This model was reflected in Rabbi Raphael Berdugo's *Leshon Limmudim* from Meknes (eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Morocco). A second model, however, assigned the *ad hoc* active role to the periphery rather than to the centre. As the centre adopts new cultural trends, it enables the periphery to lead in aspects of culture that were cast aside by the preceding centre. This was demonstrated by the emergence of the large, yet peripheral, city of Constantine in eastern Algeria as an *ad hoc* centre for Judaeo-Arabic culture, heritage, and literature, in response to the rapid adoption of French culture by Jews of the capital Algiers.

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