

The Intertwined World of the Oral and Written Transmission of Sacred Traditions in the Middle East

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A JEWISH TRANSLATION OF GENESIS IN 10TH-CENTURY EGYPTIAN ARABIC

Nick Posegay

1.0. Introduction: The Manuscript

MS Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526 comes from a Judaeo–Arabic translation of the biblical book of Genesis produced no later than the tenth century. It consists of two parchment folios containing most of Gen. 13.10 through 17.1. In total, 146 lines of text survive at least partially intact. They contain a significant number of Tiberian Hebrew vowel signs—uncommon for a Judaeo–Arabic manuscript this old—which record precise Arabic vocalisation. This article presents an edition of Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526 and analyses the linguistic features preserved by its non-Classical orthography and vocalisation. It shows that, despite the relative prestige of a biblical manuscript of this scale, the scribe who copied it did not transcribe a linguistic register that matches what might be expected of a ‘Classical Arabic’ reading tradition. Instead, they recorded phonetic variations, apparently from their own Arabic dialect, which can be extracted from the extant text to reconstruct a medieval variety of spoken Arabic.

The extant fragments of MS Yevr. II B 1526 are in the second Firkovitch Collection at the Russian National Library,¹ gathered during Abraham Firkovitch's efforts to collect Karaite manuscripts from the Middle East in the 1860s. Some—probably most—of the manuscripts in this collection ultimately come from the Karaite genizah of Cairo's Dar Simḥa Synagogue, which Firkovitch visited in 1864 (Harviainen 1996, 31–32; Ben-Shammai 2010, 45). This provenance is also likely for Yevr. II B 1526, although this article makes no arguments either for or against a Karaite being the one who translated the biblical text in Yevr. II B 1526.

Each folio of Yevr. II B 1526 originally measured about 25.5 x 25.5 cm.² They belonged to a codex that likely contained a full Arabic translation of Genesis, if not more. Each page has two columns with 19 lines of well-executed Judaeo-Arabic text, for a total of eight columns in the extant leaves. Most verses begin with a one-word Hebrew incipit in the same hand as the Judaeo-Arabic scribe and end with a vertical pair of diacritic dots.

¹ I first encountered this manuscript while digitally sorting Firkovitch material for Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich's MAJLIS project. Subsequent work was funded by a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at the University of Cambridge under the project title, "Interfaith Exchange in the Intellectual History of Middle Eastern languages." Thank you to Magdalen M. Connolly for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² This estimation is imprecise. The extant fragments are square-ish but missing substantial portions of their edges, and the measurement label digitised by the Russian National Library is unclear. I would measure the fragments myself, but they are in Russia.

Throughout this article, citations of individual lines from the manuscript take the form: 1r.1.1 (folio 1 recto, column 1, line 1). Refer to the edition below for the full context of each example.

The text of Yevr. II B 1526 contains numerous features of early phonetic Judaeo–Arabic orthography (see Blau and Hopkins 1984; Khan 2018, 150–51). They include *plene* spellings for most short *i*- and *u*-vowels (2r.2.2, אַלמַלִּיךְ *al-malik*, ‘the king’; 2r.1.11, וְהוּם *wa-hum*, ‘and they’), the use of the Hebrew *dalet* to represent Arabic *ḏād* and *ẓā*’ (see below), and an absence of the *lām* of the definite article before coronal consonants (‘sun letters’) (1v.2.13, אַשְׁמַס *aš-šams*, ‘the sun’; 2r.2.12, אַסְמָא *as-samā*, ‘heaven’).³ These features suggest a date for Yevr. II B 1526 no later than the tenth century (Blau and Hopkins 1984; Ackerman-Lieberman 2014, 162–66; Khan 2018, 150; van Putten 2020, 51). It is also likely that the manuscript predates Sa‘adiya Gaon’s translation of the Pentateuch, which used the later Classical Judaeo–Arabic orthography prior to 942 (see Ackerman-Lieberman 2014). If this is the case, then Yevr. II B 1526 is among the oldest extant Jewish translations of the Bible into Arabic (compare Blau 1992) and one of the longest samples of a pre-Sa‘adianic translation of the Pentateuch (see Vollandt 2014, 64–69, esp. fn. 25).

2.0. Writing System

The orthography of Yevr. II B 1526 follows an early phonetic Judaeo–Arabic writing system that transcribes Arabic sounds but does not conform to the orthography of Classical Arabic. Such

³ There is one instance where a sun letter appears when we would expect it to be elided (2r.2.9, אַלְנֻפּוּס *al-nufūs*, ‘souls’).

writing systems are often generalised as Early Phonetic Judaeo–Arabic Spelling (EPJAS), although there can be significant orthographic variation between the writing systems of different EPJAS texts.

2.1. Vocalisation

The manuscript's vocalisation is sporadic, but the scribe used every Tiberian vowel sign at least once.⁴ *Pataḥ* typically represents a short /a/ where we would expect to find Arabic *fatha*. *Hireq* and *qibbuṣ* represent /i/ and /u/, equivalent to *kasra* and *damma*.

2v.2.12, אֶלְבָּר *al-bar*, 'the wilderness'

2v.2.11, גִּבְעָאֵל *gibēl*, 'mountains'

1v.2.10, תִּקְבָּר *tuqbar*, 'you will be buried'

Šureq represents /u/ or /ū/, but it appears only at the ends of two plural verbs and in two other places:

2v.2.7, כָּלְעוּ *kala'ū*, 'they broke away'

2v.2.13, וַדָּרְבוּ *wa-darabū*, 'they struck'

1r.2.12, אֲתֻמָּא *'a-tumm*, 'then' [interrogative]

2v.2.13, עֵינְ אֶלְחֻכְמָא *'Ayn al-Hukm*, 'the Spring of Judgement'⁵

Segol usually indicates an Arabic *a*-vowel that has been contextually raised towards /i/ (i.e., a form of *'imāla*), approximating /ɛ/ or /æ/. For this discussion, I assume that the scribe intended

⁴ There are no Arabic vowel signs in this manuscript, but on Arabic vocalisation in Judaeo–Arabic texts, see Vidro (2018).

⁵ *'Ayn al-Hukm* is a literal translation of the biblical place name *'Eyn Mišpəṭ* in Gen. 14.7.

for the *segol* sign in Judaeo–Arabic to record a vowel similar to that which the standard Tiberian Hebrew *segol* represented (i.e., /ε/; see Khan 2020, I:259–60), and I transliterate it as such below. *Şere* appears once, presumably indicating a stronger form of *imāla* approximating /e/:

1v.1.1, מוֹתָדְהִיב *mutadehib*, ‘going on’

2r.1.10, סִיכִין *sēkin*, ‘dwelling’

Qameṣ appears once, indicating /ɔ/, though it is in a Hebrew loan rather than a native Arabic word. *Holem*, /o/, may also occur twice, but both instances are dubious, and their phonetic value is unclear:

1r.1.9, הָגַר *Hogar*, ‘Hagar’

2r.2.2, אֶל־אֹסְתָוָא *al-ʾostawā(?)*⁶

1v.2.12, דִּנְבָּ אֶל־אִמְרִי *danbo(?) l-ʾamurī*, ‘the sin of the Amorites’⁷

Šewa seems to follow its default Tiberian quality /a/ (Khan 2020, I:305), appearing frequently in places where we would expect Classical Arabic *fatha*, although its use instead of *pataḥ* may imply some reduction in length or change in quality of that

⁶ The word *al-ʾostawā(?)* corresponds to the Hebrew place name שְׁוֵה *Šaveh* from Gen. 14.17, as in “the Valley of *Šaveh*, which is the Valley of the King.”

⁷ It is slightly tempting to read the two dots on the *bet* of דִּנְבָּ as the Babylonian dot sign for /ɔ/ (see Khan 2013, 954), but more likely I suspect it is acting as a sort of conjunctive accent connecting the two elements of the construct phrase “sin of the Amorites” (Gen. 15.16). It could also just be a random ink splatter.

vowel.⁸ Elsewhere it behaves as ‘silent’ *šewa*, marking the lack of a vowel, equivalent to Arabic *sukūn*:

2v.1.13, תָּרִי *tarē*, ‘you see’

2v.2.15, מַלִּיךְ *malik*, ‘king’

2v.1.19, אֶתְּתִיחָא *u‘tīhā*, ‘I give it’

Finally, several *ḥatef pataḥ* signs also mark short /a/. They are functionally equivalent to vocalic *šewa* when it represents /a/ elsewhere in the manuscript, but follow the Masoretic Hebrew scribal tendency to not write a vocalic *šewa* on glottal or pharyngeal consonants:

1r.2.13, אָבִיר *‘akīr*, ‘back’

2v.2.11, חָתִי *ḥattē*, ‘up to’

2v.2.11, אֶלְחָוֵרִיין *al-ḥaweriyyīn*, ‘the Horites’

2v.2.14, אֶלְאַמֻּרִי *al-‘amurī*, ‘the Amorites’

2.2. Consonantal Diacritics

In addition to vowel signs, the scribe used several diacritic marks to signal other features of the Arabic text. Most notable is the system of dots and strokes to differentiate between fricative and plosive forms of a single Hebrew consonant. Within this system, the intralinear Hebrew *dageš* dot indicates the Arabic plosives *gīm*, *dāl*, *kāf*, and *tāʾ*:

⁸ In other vocalised Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts, *šewa* in unstressed, open syllables sometimes represents a short epenthetic vowel that corresponds to /i/ or /u/ in Classical Arabic, but I have not observed this phenomenon in Yevr. II B 1526. See Khan (1992, 110–11), Posegay (2020, 46), and Posegay and Arrant (2021, 266–67).

2v.2.14, אֶלְגָּאֵלִיס *al-gēlis*, ‘dwelling’

2v.1.3, אֶלְאֻרְדּוֹן *al-urduṇ*, ‘Jordan’

2v.1.10, עֵינַיִךְ *aynayk*, ‘your two eyes’

2v.1.11, אַנְתָּ *ant*, ‘you’

By contrast, a supralinear dot or oblique stroke with no *dageš* denotes the corresponding Arabic fricatives *ḡayn*, *ḏāl*, *kāʾ*, and *tāʾ*:

2r.2.16, אֶלְגֻלְמָאן *al-ḡulmān*, ‘the young men’

2v.1.13, אֵלַיִךְ *alladī*, ‘that’

2r.1.6, וַאֲכָדוּ *wa-ʾakadū*, ‘and they took’

2r.1.14, וַתְּלָאֵת *wa-ṭalāt*, ‘and three’

Additionally, a Hebrew *dalet* with a supralinear dot can indicate *either* the Arabic *ḏād* or *zāʾ*, with no graphical distinction between these letters and *ḏāl*:

2v.1.18, אֶלְאַרְדַּי *al-ʾard*, ‘the land’

2v.1.10, וַאֲנֻזֹר *wa-ʾunzur*, ‘and look’

Dageš can also indicate Arabic gemination, just as it does in Hebrew:⁹

⁹ There are also four places where *dageš* unexpectedly marks an ungeminated consonant that does not typically take *dageš lene* (2v.1.7 twice, סָדוֹם *sadom*; ‘Sodom’; 2v.1.18, אֶלְאַרְדַּי *al-ʾard*, ‘the land’; 2v.1.1, מִצְרַיִם *miṣr*, ‘Egypt’). This feature resembles Tiberian Masoretic practices that employ *dageš* to orthoepically reinforce a Hebrew consonant at the end of a syllable or onset of a word (Khan 2020, I:542–44). Such a *dageš* ensures that the reciter clearly enunciates the consonant and does not elide it with the preceding syllable. This practice is not common in Judeo-Arabic, nor is it clear that it is what is happening with the unexplained *dageš* dots in Yevr. II B 1526.

2v.1.9, וארב *war-rabb*, ‘and the Lord’

1r.2.6, אַיִןךְ *’innik*, ‘indeed you’

A supralinear stroke resembling the Hebrew *rafe* sign appears in several places. It sometimes seems to mark a *mater lectionis* letter that stands for a vowel sound, but other times it indicates a fricative consonant or its meaning is unclear. Whether the original scribe, or other users, added all these signs is not certain:

2v.2.5, אַלמָּאֵלִיחַ *al-mēlih*, ‘salty’

2v.2.7, כָּלְעוּ *kala’ū*, ‘they broke away’

2v.2.3, עֵמָּק *’amaq*, ‘valley’

The Hebrew *mappiq* dot also occurs often in the letter *he’*, usually at the end of words, both when it represents an Arabic *tā’ marbūta* and when it represents a pronominal suffix:

1v.1.17, תַּלְתָּה *talāta*, ‘three’

2v.1.6, בִּיאָכְבִּיתוֹה *bi-’akbiyatuh*, ‘in his tents’

3.0. Edition of MS Yevr. II B 1526

Note that the manuscript has been photographed and digitised the wrong way round.¹⁰ The extant text begins on the verso of folio 2 and ends on the recto of folio 1.

¹⁰ Images and further description available here: <https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/>.

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f2 verso:

Column 1	Line
{...} אַרְדִּי מֵצֵר מוֹת {...} (Gen. 13.10)	1
{...} וְאֶבְרָהָם לֹוֹה לֹוֹת אֶבְרָהָם {...} (11)	2
אַלְאֶרְדֹּן וְאַרְתַּחֲלָל {לֹוֹת} מִן אֶשְׂרָק	3
וְאַפְתָּרְקוֹ אָמַר מִן אֶבְרָהָם {כִּי} וְהָאֵל: (12) אֶבְרָם:	4
קַעֲדָה פִּי אֶבְרָהָם {כִּי} עֵץ וְלֹוֹת קַעֲדָה פִּי	5
קוֹרֵי אֶלְגֹּוֹן {...} בְּאֶזְבִּיתוֹהָ אֵלֵי	6
סָדוֹם: (13) {וְאֶנְשֵׁי}: וְאֶוֹנִיסִי סָדוֹם רִדְיִין	7
וְכִיִּבִּין לְרֶב {גִּי...} עֵנִי בִּינְדִי אֶלְרֶב:	8
(14) {וִוִי}: וְאַרְבִּי קָאֵל לְאַבְרָם מִן בַּעַד אֶפְתָּרְקוֹ	9
לֹוֹת מִיְנוֹהָ אֶסְנִי יָא עֵינִיד וְאַנְדֹּר	10
מִן אֶלְמוֹדִיעַ אֶלְדִּי אַנְתָּ תָם שְׁמִיָּא וְ	11
וְקַבְלִי וְשִׂרְקָא וּבַחֲרָא: (15) {כִּי}: לֹאֵן	12
אֵי בֹל אֶלְאֶרְדִּי אֶלְדִּי אַנְתָּ תִּקְרִי לִךְ	13
אַעֲטִיָּהָ וְלֹלְדִךְ אֵלֵי אֶלְאֶבְדִּי: (16) {וְשִׁמְתִּי}:	14
וְאַוְצִיִּיר אֵי וְלֹדִךְ בְּתוֹרְבִי אֶלְאֶרְדִּי	15
אֶלְדִּי אֵן יִסְתַּטֵּעַ אֶנְסִין לִיחְצִי אֵי	16
תוֹרָאֵב אֶלְאֶרְדִּי הֵם וְלֹדִךְ יוֹחְצָא:	17
(17) {קוֹם}: אֶסְלֹוֹךְ פִּי אֶלְאֶרְדִּי לְטוֹלְהָא	18
{...} דֵּהָא אֵן לִךְ אַעֲטִיָּהָ: (18) {וַיֵּאחֶל}:	19

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f2 recto:

Column 1	Line
{...} אלכמסה: ^(14.9)	1
{...} בִּיאר חומר ⁽¹⁰⁾	2
{...} ה ווקעו תם	3
{...} אל: ⁽¹¹⁾ (ויקחו):	4
{...} סדום ועמרה	5
{...} אב להום ואנטלקו: ⁽¹²⁾ ואכדו	6
וסרחוה איבן אבי אברם	7
{...} לק..א גאליס פי סדום: ⁽¹³⁾ (ויבא):	8
{...} אלמנפליית וכבר לאברם אלעברי	9
{...} א סיבין בבלוט ממרי אלאמורי אבו	10
{...} ול ואכו ענר והום אַכְדָאן עהד	11
{...} ר:ם: ⁽¹⁴⁾ (וישמע): וסמיע אברם אָד: סובי	12
אכוה וגרד איי תאדיבוה א'ולד ¹¹ ביתוה	13
{י} עני תלאמידוה תמנתעשר ותלת	14
{מ} ייה ופלב אלי בִּאניאַס: ⁽¹⁵⁾ (ויחלק): וקסם	15
{ע} ליהום אליל הוא ועבידוה וקתלהום ו	16
{...} הום אלי. אלדי מן שמאל דמשק: ⁽¹⁶⁾ ורד	17

¹¹ A later hand inserted the first *vav* in א'ולד.

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f2 recto:

Column 2	Line
{...} כדרלעמר ואיי אל{מלוד אל}די ^(14.17)	1
מעוה א{ל ... } אלאסטווא הוא עמק אלמליך:	2
{...} (ומלכי'צ): ומ{לכי}צדק מליך סאליס אכר{ג}	3
טעאם ומא{..} א אימאם לטאיק א{.}אדם	4
וברהוה וקאל מוברך {...}לטאיק אלעאלי ⁽¹⁹⁾	5
קני אסמא ואלאר{ד}: ⁽²⁰⁾ (וברוד) ומוברך אטייק	6
אלעאלי אלדי חיין אעדא{...}יד ודפע אליה	7
אלעושר מן כול: ⁽²¹⁾ (ויא) וקאל מליך סדום	8
לאברם אדפע לי אלנפוס יעני אלקווים	9
אלדי אכדו ואסרח כוד לך : ⁽²²⁾ (ויאמר):	10
וקאל אברם למליך סדום דפעת יד{י} אלי	11
ארב אטייק אלעאלי קני אסמא ואלארד:	12
{...} (אם): אמין שמע ואלי שראך נעל אן ⁽²³⁾	13
אכוד מן כול אלדי לך ולא תקול אנא	14
אגנית איי אברם: ⁽²⁴⁾ (בלעדי): כלא אלדי	15
אבלו אלזלמאן וקסמת אלאוניסי אלדי	16
סלכו מעי ענר אשכל וממרא הום	17
יכדון אנצבתהום: ^(15.1) (אחר): מן {בעד ...}	18
דליך אלכלאם כאן כ{טב} ארב{...}	19

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f1 verso:

Column 1	Line
לי {ו}אני מותדהיב עקים ו{...}קד ביתי ^(15.2)	1
הוא דמשקי אליעזר: ⁽³⁾ (ויא) וקאל אברם	2
הודא לי לם תעטי ולד והודא איבן	3
אהלי ירית איי: ⁽⁴⁾ (והנה): והודא כיטאב	4
ארב אליה ק{אל} לא לא יריתך דא אילא	5
אלדי יכרוג מן א{מ}עאך יריד צלבוה	6
הוא יריתך ⁽⁵⁾ (ויוצא): ואכרג אייה כ	7
כארגא וקאל אלתפית יא אסמא ואחצי	8
אלכואכיב אן תסתטיע לתחצי איהום	9
וקאל לזה כדא יכון ולדך: ⁽⁶⁾ (והא): ואמין	10
ברב וחסבהא לזה עידאלה: ⁽⁷⁾ ויאמר:	11
וקאל לזה אנא ארב אלדי אכרגתך מן	12
אדוהא לאדפע איליך איי תיך אלארד	13
לתריתהא יעני ארד כנען: ⁽⁸⁾ ויא: וקאל	14
יארב יא אילאה במאדא אעריף איני	15
{אר}יתהא: ⁽⁹⁾ ויא: וקאל לזה כוד לי מן אלעוגול	16
תלתה ומן אלמעזא תלתה ומן אלכיבאש	17
{...}ה {..}וקטי וגוזל: ⁽¹⁰⁾ ויקח: ואכד לזה	18
{...} פי אלוסט וצנע	19

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f1 verso:

Column 2	Line
{...} וירד: ^(15.11)	1
{...} וקע עלא ⁽¹²⁾	2
{...} בפירה וקע{ת} {...}	3
{...} עלם תעלם ⁽¹³⁾	4
{...} ארד ליס לה{ום} {...}	5
{...} ויעדיבוהום ארבע מייה {...}	6
{...} והם איי אשעב אלדי יסת{...}	7
{...} אנא מודין ומן בעד דאליך יכר{...}	8
{...} כביר יעני אכריגהום: ⁽¹⁵⁾ ואתה: ואת	9
תנטליק אלי אבאך בסלאם תקבר	10
בשייבה גיידה: ⁽¹⁶⁾ ודור: וגיל ראביע	11
ירגעו הונא לאן לם יכמול דנג אלאמרי	12
חתי אלאן: ⁽¹⁷⁾ ויהי: וכאנת אשמש גילה {..}:	13
ודוהמה כאנת ואידי תנור דוכאן ופל{..}ל{..}	14
נאר אלדי גאז ביין אוליך אלקסאם: ⁽¹⁸⁾ ביום:	15
פי דליך אליום קטע ארב מע אברם ע{הד}	16
קאיל לולדך דפעת איי הידיה אלארד מן	17
גיל מצר אלי אנהר אלכביר נהר אלפוראת:	18
את: ⁽¹⁹⁾ איי אלקייני ואיי אלקניזי ואיי אלמשר{ק}	19

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f1 recto:¹²

Column 1	Line
{...}הא הגר: (16.1)	1
{...}אב{רם ה'ודא אנא (2)	2
{...}ליא אלי אמת' לעל	3
{...}אברם לקוול שרי:	4
{...}רת אברם איי הגר (3)	5
{...}אמתהא מן אנקידא עשר	6
{...}קעווד אברם פי ארד כנען ודפעת	7
{...}א לאברם ז'וגהא לזה ל'מרה: (4) ויבא	8
וגא אלי הגר וחבילת ונדרת איד	9
חבילת וסתכפת מולתהא פי עייניהא:	10
(5) ותא וקאלת שרי לאברם דולמי עליך	11
ואיני דפעת אמת' פי חיגרד ונדרת	12
איד חבילת ואסתכפת פי עיניהא י	13
יחכום ארב בייני ובינך: (6) ויא וקאל	14
אברם לשרי ה'ודא אמת' ביד'ך	15
אעמלי להא אלדי יחסון פי עיניך ו	16
{...}עדבתהא שרי והרבת מן בינדיהא:	17
(7) וימצ ווגידהא מלאך ארב עלי עין	18
אלמא פי אלבר עלא אל{...} פי טריק	19

¹² A later hand inserted the first *vav* in ה'ודא (ll. 2, 15) and ז'וגהא (l. 8).

Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526, f1 recto:

Column 2	Line
אנא {...} ⁽⁹⁾ {מ}לאך ^(16.8)	1
ארב ארג{ע...} ואתעדבי	2
תחת ידיהא: ⁽¹⁰⁾ ויא וקאל להא מלאך	3
ארב כתרה אוכתיר איי ולדיך ולא	4
יוחצא מן אלכתרה ⁽¹¹⁾ ויא וקאל להא מלאך	5
ארב אַניך חובלא ותלידי איבן ואדעי	6
אסמוה אסמעיל תפסי{ר..} סמיע אטייק	7
אד סמיע ארב אלי שקאך: ⁽¹²⁾ והוא יכון	8
וחשי אלדמי ידוה פי כול ויד כול ביה	9
ועלא וגה כל אכותוה יסכון: ⁽¹³⁾ ותקרא	10
ודעת אסם ארב אלמוכטיב אליהא אנת	11
טייק נדרי איד קאלת אַתּוּם הונא ראית	12
אַכִּיר נדרי: ⁽¹⁴⁾ על כן: עלא דליך דועי ללבר	13
ביר לחין נדרת הודא ביין אלמַנְעֵד ובין	14
ברד: ⁽¹⁵⁾ ותלד וולידת חגר לאברם איבן ודעא	15
אברם אסם אבנוה אלדי ולידת הגר	16
אסמעיל: ⁽¹⁶⁾ ואברם איבן תמאנין סנה ו	17
וסית סנין בולדה הגר איי אסמע{יל}	18
ויהי וכאן אברם {א...} ^(17.1)	19

4.0. Linguistic Analysis

The writing system employed in this manuscript records several features of the scribe's Arabic dialect, including variations in the realisation of consonants and vowels like /g/ and /ε/. The translator's vocabulary and syntax provide further data for reconstructing their Arabic dialect while also revealing influences from their Hebrew source text. The following discussion is only a partial analysis and notes that further examination is needed to do justice to all the non-Classical patterns of pronunciation, vocabulary, and morphosyntax in this manuscript.

4.1. *Gimel* and *Gīm*

The scribe systematically deployed the Hebrew letter *gimel* with *dageš* and supralinear dots to signify the Classical Arabic consonants *jīm* and *gayn*. *Gimel* with a supralinear dot and no *dageš* indicates *gayn*, graphically mimicking the diacritic dot on the Arabic character (غ):

2r.2.15, אגנית 'aġnit, 'I have made rich'

2r.2.16, אלגלמאן al-ġulmān, 'the young men'

By contrast, a *gimel* with *dageš* invariably represents *jīm*—or rather, the scribe's dialectal reflex of Classical Arabic *jīm*. Most medieval Judaeo-Arabic scribes distinguished *jīm* by placing a diacritic dot above or below a *gimel* (Connolly 2019, 157), so this scribe's choice to use *dageš* instead is somewhat irregular. It suggests that they pronounced *jīm* the same way as Tiberian Hebrew *gimel* with *dageš*; that is, as a voiced velar stop /g/:

1v.1.6, יכרוג *yakrug*, ‘he goes out’

1v.1.8, כארגא *kārig^{an}*, ‘outwards’

1r.2.10, וגה *wagh*, ‘face’

2v.2.12, אלחיגאז *al-ḥigēz*, ‘the Hijaz’

2v.2.13, וגו *wa-gāwū(?)*, ‘and they came’

This dialectal *gīm* reflex is best known from modern varieties of Egyptian Arabic, but some Judaeo–Arabic papyri suggest it may have existed in Egypt as early as the ninth century (Connolly 2019, 167–68), and it is present in Classical Judaeo–Arabic manuscripts dating to approximately the eleventh century (Posegay 2020, 49; Posegay and Arrant 2021, 270–71). Since Yevr. II B 1526 was produced no later than the tenth century and most likely belonged to Karaites in Cairo,¹³ it seems to be an early witness to this Egyptian feature. *Gimel* with no dot at all is rare in the manuscript, but it also indicates *gīm*:

1r.1.12, חגרא *ḥigrak*, ‘your embrace’

2v.2.15, גדי *gadi*, ‘[‘Ayn] Gedi’¹⁴

¹³ A further hint of an Egyptian provenance comes from the manuscript’s translation of Gen. 15.18. The original Hebrew states that God will give Abram’s descendants land “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.” The Arabic translator amends this verse with the name of the Egyptian river, writing “from the Nile of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates” (1v.2.17–18, מן ניל מצר אלי אנהר, (אלכביר נהר אלפוראת).

¹⁴ Compare discussion of unpointed *gimel* in Connolly (2019, 157), particularly fn. 3–5.

4.2. Interdental Consonants

The regular uses of *dageš* and supralinear diacritic dots suggests that the scribe made some distinction between the Arabic interdental plosives and fricatives, but they do not mark both types in every case. They clearly recorded the voiceless interdental *tā'* /t/ with *dageš*, in contrast to marking the fricative *tā'* /t̤/ with a supralinear dot, more than a dozen times each (e.g., 2r.1.14, תַּמַּנְתַּעֲשֶׂר *tamant'ašr*, 'eighteen'). Furthermore, *tav* with neither supralinear dot *nor* *dageš* usually represents /t/, but there are three exceptions where we expect to find /t̤/ in Classical Arabic:

1r.2.4, כְּתֵרָה *kaṭra*, 'multitude'

1r.2.5, אֶלְכְּתֵרָה *al-kaṭra*, 'the multitude'

1r.2.17, תַּמָּנִין *tamānīn*, 'eighty'

The scribe also distinguished the voiced Arabic interdentals *dāl* /d/ and *ḏāl* /ḏ/ using these diacritics, although they are less consistent than with their voiceless counterparts:

1v.2.11, גַּיִידָה *gayyida*, 'good'

2v.1.17, וְלִדְךָ *waladak*, 'your son'

2r.1.17, דִּמַּשְׁקַּ *dimašq*, 'Damascus'

2v.1.11, אֵלָּדִי *'alladī*, 'that'

2r.1.6, וַאֲכָדּוּ *wa-'aḳadū*, 'and they seized'

1v.1.10, כַּדָּא *kaḏā*, 'like, as'

Notably, it is not clear that the scribe consistently differentiated an emphatic interdental fricative *zā'* /z̤/ from the non-emphatic *ḏāl* /ḏ/, as both letters can appear as a Hebrew *dalet* with a single supralinear dot or stroke:

1v.1.16, כֹּד *kuḏ*, ‘take, bring’

1r.1.9, ונזררת *wa-naẓarat*, ‘and she saw’

The typical early phonetic Judaeo–Arabic practice of transcribing both Arabic *ḏād* and *ẓā* with *dalet* and a supralinear dot further complicates this conflation. Both are graphically identical to *dāl* when they appear with a supralinear dot:

2r.1.14, תלמידיה *talāmīḏuh*, ‘his students, his disciples’

2v.1.11, אלמודיע אלדי *al-mawḏīʿ ʿalladī*, ‘the place which’

2v.2.13, ודרבו *wa-ḏarabū*, ‘and they struck’¹⁵

They can also appear as a *dalet* with no dot, in which case they are identical to *dāl*. This fact means that the Hebrew *dalet* with no diacritic dots can stand for four different consonants, distinguished only by context, and we cannot be sure that the scribe or the manuscript’s readers ‘correctly’ differentiated them in every place:

1r.1.12, דפעת *dafaʿt*, ‘I handed over’

1r.1.13, אידי *ʾid*, ‘when, then’

1r.1.11, דולמי *ḏulmī*, ‘my iniquity’

1r.1.7, ארד *ʿarḏ*, ‘land’

This lack of distinction suggests that the consonantal phonemes typically represented by *ẓā* and *ḏād* in Classical Arabic may have lost their emphatic character and merged with *dāl* and

¹⁵ The word ודרבו might be pointed ודִרְבוּ, but the vocalisation marks are partially illegible. It is also a clear example where the mark on the *dalet* representing Arabic *ḏād* looks more like a horizontal stroke than a point (i.e., ד). The variation between dots and strokes on כפ"ת letters often appears to be random, perhaps reflecting the work of multiple pointers.

dāl, respectively, in the scribe's Arabic dialect. That dialect was then in the process of losing the voiced interdental fricative /ḏ/, such that *ḏāl*, *ḏā'*, and *ḏād* could all be conflated with the voiced alveolar stop /d/ represented by Hebrew *dalet* with *dageš*. Other explanations are possible (perhaps two pointers with different dialects, or two pointers at different times in the chronology of a single dialect), but it appears that the scribe heard the same sound when pronouncing the Arabic letters *ḏād*, *ḏā'*, and *ḏāl*.¹⁶

4.3. Non-Standard Vocalisation

Most of the vocalised words in Yevr. II B 1526 are either non-Arabic loans or Arabic words that match the expected vowels of Classical Arabic. However, of note are places where the scribe recorded an *e*-vowel in place of an expected Classical Arabic /a/ or /ā/. This phenomenon is usually known in Arabic as *'imāla* 'bending down' (Hopkins 2005; Levin 2007; Khan 2018, 150–51; van Putten 2020, 62–64; Posegay 2020, 44–45). In such cases, the scribe of Yevr. II B 1526 preferred the Hebrew *segol* sign, approximating /ε/. This sign often appears where Classical Arabic would have *'alif* indicating long medial /ā/ or *'alif maqṣūra* indicating long final /ā/:

2v.1.13, תָּרִי *tarē*, 'you see'

2v.1.6, קוּרִי *qurē*, 'villages'

¹⁶ On a related note, see discussion of the (lack of) merger between *ḏ and *ḏ in the variety of Arabic recorded by the early phonetic Judaeo-Arabic text of MS Cambridge University Library, T-S 13J8.7 (van Putten 2020, 68).

2v.1.10, אַ yē, ‘O, now’¹⁷

2v.2.11, הָטַי hattē, ‘up to’

2v.2.11, גִּבְעַל שָׂרָא gibēl šarē, ‘the Mountains of Šarat’¹⁸

1v.2.13, גִּילָה gēla, ‘revolved, set’ [of the sun after setting]

It is notable that several of these words, specifically those with II- and III-weak roots (i.e., תָּרַי tarē; קוּרַי qurē; and גִּילָה gēla), seem to preserve a phonemic long *e*-vowel known from early medieval reports by Arabic grammarians (see discussion in van Putten 2022, 24–28 and Rabin 1951, 113).

As mentioned above, the Hebrew *šere* sign appears in only one Arabic word, approximating long /ē/ where Classical Arabic would have /ā/. It is not clear what makes *sēkin* in this context phonologically distinct from other *fā‘il* patterns like *sēlim* or *gēlis* that are marked with *segol*.

2r.1.10, סִיכִין ‘dwelling’

2r.2.3, מַלִּיךְ סָאִלִּים malik sēlim, ‘a perfect king’¹⁹

2v.2.14, אֶל־גִּילָה al-gēlis, ‘dwelling’

There are also a few examples of *segol* with short medial vowels:

¹⁷ The particle yē, which looks like the Classical Arabic vocative particle yā, is a translation of the Hebrew word אַ כֵּן (‘please, now’) from Gen. 13.14.

¹⁸ ‘Mountains of Šarat’ refers to the southern mountainous region of Jordan with the same name. It is a translation of the Biblical ‘Mount Seir’ from Gen. 14.6.

¹⁹ Equivalent to מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם meleḵ šālem (‘the King of Salem’) from Gen. 14.18, but the translator appears to interpret šālem as an adjective (cognate with Classical Arabic *sālim*) rather than a place name.

2r.1.11, אֶכְדָּאן *ʿekdān* or *ʿekdīn*, ‘they two held’

2r.1.13, תְּאֲדִיבוּה *teʿdibuh*, ‘his educated/disciplined [ones]’²⁰

The *plene* orthography of Yevr. II B 1526 also preserves vowels that diverge from expected Classical Arabic vocalisation, including further evidence of *a*-vowels raised towards /e/ or /i/. One example is the contrast between the Arabic prepositions ‘*alā* ‘upon’ and ‘*ilā* ‘to’. The scribe consistently spells ‘*alā* with final *aleph*, but ‘*ilā* with final *yod*:

1r.2.13, עֲלָא *ʿalā*, ‘on’

2v.1.14, אֵלֵי *ʿilā*, ‘to’

In Classical Arabic, both particles are typically spelled with *alif maqṣūra* representing final /ā/, but the Judaeo–Arabic orthography implies that the scribe heard their vowels differently, more

²⁰ *Teʿdibuh* is an odd form that artificially conforms to the Hebrew morphology of this verse. Gen. 14.14, which relates Abraham’s call for 318 men to aid him in battle, includes the phrase תְּנִיכֵי יְלִידֵי בֵיתוֹ ‘his trained [ones] who were born in his house’. The Judaeo–Arabic translator renders it with the longer תְּאֲדִיבוּה אֵלֵי אֵלֵי בֵיתוֹ {י} עֲנֵי תִלְאֲמִידוֹה ‘his educated [ones], the boys of his house, that is, his students’. This interpretation seems to stem from a Talmudic explanation which holds that the 318 men were Torah scholars and Abraham’s disciples (Nedarim 32a:14). In what I cannot quite believe is a coincidence, this depiction of Abraham as the leader of a group of scholars corresponds with a passage in a letter by Dawid bar Pawlos, a late eighth-century West Syriac abbot. Dawid writes that his great, great grandfather Sabroy founded a miaphysite school near Mosul and links his students to Abraham’s followers, stating “He gathered 318 men for a school, and he set his son over them as a leader, and he resembled the head of the patriarchs, Abraham” (Dolabani 1953, 48, lines 11–13; Posegay 2021, 146, 148).

like *ʿalā* and *ʿilē* or *ʿilī*. Other orthographic differences from the expected vocalisation of Classical Arabic can be found throughout the edition (e.g., 1v.2.17, הידיה אלארד *hīdīhi al-ʿarḏ*, ‘this land’).

4.4. Pronouns and Pronominal Suffixes

Both the independent and suffixed forms of the Arabic pronouns in Yevr. II B 1526 differ from the expected orthography and morphology of Classical Arabic. Most obvious are the *plene* spellings of the independent third-person pronouns *huwā* and *hiyā*, which happen to share the same orthography as the equivalent pronouns in Hebrew:

2r.1.16, הוא *huwā*, ‘he, it’

2v.2.13, היא *hiyā*, ‘she, it’

Meanwhile, the definite relative pronoun *ʿalladī* appears without inflection for gender or number. Blau and Hopkins have argued that this invariable relative pronoun is a ‘classicised’ archaic feature of early phonetic Judaeo–Arabic (1987, 125), but it persists even in modern Arabic dialects (van Putten 2020, 63, 66). The invariable relative pronoun is thus more likely to be a dialectal evolution of an older inflected pronoun, rather than a ‘classicism’.

In contrast to *ʿalladī*, the translator does inflect demonstrative pronouns, including the Classical masculine singular *ḏālik*, a vaguely Classical masculine plural *ʿulāʾik* or *ʿulayk*, and a non-Classical feminine singular *tik*.

1v.2.8, בעד דאליך *baʿd ḏālik*, ‘after that’

1v.2.16, דליך אליום *ḏālik al-yawm*, ‘that day’

2v.2.15, אלקסאם אולִּיךְ *ulā'ik al-q[i]sām*, 'those portions'

1v.1.13, תִּיךְ אֶלְאָרֶד *tik al-'ard*, 'that land'

Several pronominal suffixes also take non-Classical forms throughout the text. For the third-person masculine singular suffix (equivalent to Classical *-hu*), the scribe instead gives *-uh*, following a practice known from other vocalised, early phonetic and classical Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts (Blau and Hopkins 1987, 151; Posegay 2020, 39, fn. 30; van Putten 2020, 57; Posegay and Arrant 2021, 166). For the second-person feminine singular, they give *-ik*, the same as numerous modern Arabic dialects. The second-person masculine singular suffix may also match the *-ak* ending of such dialects and other vocalised Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts (compare Khan 2010, 210; Posegay 2020, 47), but the scribe spells it defectively with no vowel signs:

2r.1.16, וְעִבְדֻהּ *wa-'ibīduh*, 'and his servants'

1r.1.15, אִמְתִּיךְ *'amatik*, 'your maidservant'

1v.1.12, אֶכְרַגְתִּיךְ *'akragtak(?)*, 'I sent you out'

2r.1.15, וְלִדְךָ *waladak*, 'your son'

4.5. Particles Influenced by Hebrew Forms

Other features are best explained as the translator's artificial attempts to match the Hebrew of their source text, rather than natural features of spoken Arabic. For example, they apply the Arabic particle *'iyyā* (perhaps *'iyyē*) as a one-to-one equivalent of the Hebrew direct object marker *'et*, including with pronominal suffixes:

1v.1.13, אִי *'iyyā* [direct object marker]

1v.1.4, אִי *'iyyāy*, 'me'

1v.1.7 אייה *ʾiyyāh*, ‘him’

1v.1.9, איהום *ʾiyyāhum*, ‘them’

It is unlikely that this particle was equally productive in the translator’s dialect. Similarly, the Arabic *huwaḏā* translates the Hebrew particle *hinne* ‘indeed, behold’ (1v.1.3, הוּדָא; 1r.1.15, הוּדָא). The translator also invariably renders the Hebrew tetragrammaton with אַרַב (*ar-rabb*), rather than the more common Judaeo-Arabic אַלְלָה (*allāh*), as well as אַטְיִיק (2r.2.12, *aṭ-ṭayyiq?*) for Hebrew *El*.

5.0. Conclusion: Arabic Reading Traditions and Vernacular Phonology

MS Firkovitch Yevr. II B 1526 comes from an early medieval Arabic translation of Genesis produced no later than the tenth century CE. It employs an early phonetic Judaeo-Arabic writing system that preserves distinct phonological features of the variety of Arabic spoken by the scribe who wrote it. This scribe was well-trained in Hebrew calligraphy and they (or someone shortly after them) also vocalised the text using Tiberian signs that would make difficult portions easier to read aloud. These signs recorded vocalic variations not typically represented in Classical Arabic writing, but which the vocaliser nevertheless perceived as discrete vowel qualities that corresponded to sounds in their pronunciation tradition of Biblical Hebrew. There is still much more to be learned about the linguistic features of this text. In particular, the Arabic vocabulary that the translator used to render Hebrew place names and people groups, many of which appear in

the extant chapters, may enable more precise identification of their geographic context.

The careful execution and professional character of the scribal work raises questions about the cultural status of this biblical translation for an Arabic-speaking Jew in the medieval world. Where would this book have been read? Was it strictly for private use, or was the Arabic also recited in more public settings, akin to the Aramaic Targumim? It belongs to a growing corpus of Judaeo–Arabic biblical and ritual texts with precise Tiberian vocalisation,²¹ a phenomenon which suggests that some Jews were reciting such texts in Arabic. More research is needed to better understand both the function of Arabic in the recitation traditions of early medieval Jews and the position of Judaeo–Arabic manuscripts like this one in the broader study of Arabic historical linguistics.

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²¹ These texts include the present translation of Genesis, a translation glossary to the book of Samuel (Posegay 2020, esp. fn. 23), a translation of Ecclesiastes (Posegay and Arrant 2021), and an Arabic *siddur* by Sa‘adya Gaon (Khan 2010, 202–10; 2017, 296–402).

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