VOCALISED JUDAEO-ARABIC
MANUSCRIPTS IN THE CAIRO GENIZAH

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The Cairo Genizah collections include a number of fragments containing Judaeo-Arabic texts that are vocalised with Hebrew vowel signs. The majority of these are datable to the High Middle Ages, as is the case with the bulk of the Genizah manuscripts. A few vocalised Judaeo-Arabic fragments can be dated to a later period. The purpose of this paper is to examine some aspects of the linguistic background of these texts from the two periods. The corpus will be divided into the medieval texts and the later texts. The late examples of vocalised Judaeo-Arabic can be dated to the Ottoman period, judging by linguistic parallels with other Judaeo-Arabic texts from this period. The following features will be described for each of these groups of manuscripts: (i) the orthography and its relationship to the vocalisation, (ii) the linguistic form of the Arabic reflected by the vocalisation signs, (iii) the linguistic background of the Hebrew vocalisation signs.

1. Medieval Judaeo-Arabic

(i) Orthography

The vocalised Judaeo-Arabic texts that are datable to the medieval period are written with what has come to be known as ‘Classical Judaeo-Arabic orthography’.¹ This is a system of spelling that was the norm in Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts from the tenth century until the Mamluk period; therefore it is the orthography that is found in most Genizah material. It is characterised by a close imitation of the orthography of Classical Arabic (henceforth CA). A conspicuous feature that is taken over from Arabic orthography is the regular spelling of the

definite article with *alef* + *lamed* even before ‘sun’ letters, to which the /l/ of the article is assimilated in pronunciation, e.g.

(1) אַלְסָמְוַאַת, ‘the heavens’ (T-S Ar.8.3, fol. 14r = *assamawāt* السماوات)

Another distinctive feature is the spelling of *dād* and *ẓā‘* by a *sade* and a *tet* with a superscribed dot, in imitation of the Arabic letters ض و, e.g.

(2) וּתֻפַֿצִ֗לְנַא, ‘you give preference to us’ (T-S Ar.8.3, fol. 14r = *utufaddilnā* وتفضلا)

These features are not found in the earlier Judaeo-Arabic texts, which spell the language phonetically according to a Hebrew and Aramaic type of orthography. In these texts, which are unvocalised, the *lamed* is not written in the article if it is assimilated in pronunciation.

The *dād*, furthermore, is represented by *dalet*, this being felt to be the closest corresponding consonant phonetically, e.g.

(3) אַשְׁמָס, ‘the sun’ = *aššams* (اَلسَّمْسِ)
(4) אַלֹאֵרֵד, ‘the ground’ = *alʾard* (الْارَض)

It does not follow that Judaeo-Arabic texts written with an orthography conforming to that of Classical Arabic were read with the phonological form of Classical Arabic. This is clearly demonstrated by the vocalisation of the texts, which reflects numerous non-Classical features. Most of these features are disguised by the orthography and so the vocalised texts are valuable in demonstrating the gap between orthography and pronunciation of medieval Judaeo-Arabic texts. In some cases the dialectal pronunciation conflicts with the orthography. This applies to the 3ms suffix, which is regularly pronounced with its dialectal form—*u* although it is normally spelt with *he* in imitation of Classical Arabic, e.g.

(5) גַּלְעִס וַעַשְׂמָוַה וַתִּמְסָרִי, ‘his sitting, his standing and his travelling’
(T-S Ar.8.3, fol. 14v = *julūsu waqiyāmu wamasīru*)

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2 Ibid.