

**Translators, copyists and interpreters: Jews,
Christians and Muslims and the transmission
of the Bible into Arabic in the Middle Ages
(Casa Árabe, Córdoba, April 26-28 2017)**

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In late April of this year, we had the opportunity to participate in an international conference on the field of biblical studies. This conference was one of the meetings that a group of scholars from around the world organize— every time in a different country - with the purpose of presenting their research work and to share new ideas with colleagues. These meetings have the format of an international conference focusing in the transmission of the Bible into Arabic in the Middle Ages. This year, the city of Córdoba was the perfect scenario to host this conference. The conference was mainly organized by the University of Cordoba, with Professor Monferrer-Sala as the lead event organizer. It was convened by the University of Cordoba, the University of Tel Aviv and the Institute for Advanced Studies (Princeton), and it took place at the headquarters of Casa Árabe in Cordoba which is located at a Mudejar styled house, which dates from the 14th century. The setting of the conference was a peculiar building, which helped to relate the history of Cordoba with the aim of this international conference. In addition, the participants of the conference were able to enjoy the city, specially its historical center where Casa Árabe is located and where all the activities took place. The conference lasted three days (26th-28th April) with four sessions the first two days and two sessions on the last one.

Wednesday April 26th

After the opening session in which the Director of Casa Árabe's headquarters in Córdoba, Dr. Javier Rosón, welcomed the participants to the conference to Córdoba, Prof. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala—as

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organizer of the conference – presented the three days programme and introduced Prof. Federico Corriente Córdoba (Saragossa University) who was the opening keynote speaker. Prof. Corriente's lecture was titled: *Canonization of texts through linguistic archaism and higher registers: the case of the Psalter fragment published by Prof. Violet*. Using the example of the bilingual Psalter fragment found by Prof. Violet in Damascus, Prof. Corriente discussed how the canonized texts were influenced by the language register in some areas, as well as the dominant language in use. Prof. Corriente's splendid contribution during this lecture was well accepted by the audience and elicited an interesting discussion about the use of language in these kind of texts.

The first session of the day, JUDEO-ARABIC TRANSLATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS, was opened by Ilana Sasson (Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT) who presented her talk titled: *The Open Book—Textual Fluidity and the History of Transmission: A Case Study of A Medieval Karaite Commentary*. This work was the result of a previous study made by Prof. Sasson in which she edited Yefet b. Ali's Arabic translation of the Book of Proverbs. Thanks to this study, she found significant variants between the different manuscripts that she used. During her presentation, the audience was nicely presented with examples of these variants that Prof. Sasson discussed following a methodical analysis of each one.

Marzena Zawadowska (University of Warsaw & Jewish Historical Institute) presented the second talk of this session and spoke about the Medieval Karaite. In this case study, Zawadowska was focused in the Arabic Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible. Her talk *Stylistic Explanations of Theological Cruxes in the Medieval Karaites' Arabic Commentaries on the Hebrew Bibles* how the Karaites exegetes modified the biblical texts through their interpretations of some expressions and narrative parts. As a consequence, in their commentaries the Karaites refused the anthropomorphic view that the Jews used to have and which is reflected in the biblical text. Zawadowska argued this hypothesis taking examples in which biblical text had been modified using this anthropomorphic view and how the Karaites exegetes were against it.

Gregor Schwarb (SOAS University of London) closed the session offering the results of his research, which he titled: *Authorship,*

structure and genre of the commentary known as B'rēshīth Rabbā ascribed to Yeshu'ah ben Yehudah. The starting point of this talk was a recent scholarly opinion in which the Yeshu'ah ben Yehuda authorship of the Bereshit Rabba was questioned. Thanks to that, Gregor Schwarb took the opportunity to investigate different elements of the text that allowed him to determine the authorship of this text. To carry out his research, Schwarb analyzed the original Arabic fragments, comparing them with the Hebrew translations.

After a break for lunch, the next session was opened by Arik Sadan (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Tel Aviv University; Shalem College; Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) who gave a talk titled: *Different Transmissions of Yefet Ben Eli's Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job in Judeo-Arabic, Based on the Available Manuscripts written in Arabic and Hebrew Letters.* During his talk, Arik Sadan explored the differences between the manuscripts written using the Arabic alphabet and the manuscripts written using Hebrew characters. The examples selected for this presentation by the author were very helpful and in addition allowed Arik Sadan to draw the possible origin of these manuscripts, both using the Arabic characters and the Hebrew ones.

Tania García Arévalo (University of Granada) was not able to attend the conference in person but she sent the organizing committee her talk titled: *Šarḥ in Modern Times and its relation to medieval sources: Continuity or rupture?* The paper was read by Prof. Lourdes Bonhome (University of Cordoba). García Arévalo's talk was interesting to the audience because she worked with different sources that haven't been well analyzed yet taking the point of this kind of text transmission. García Arévalo's work has as a starting point the fragments found in the Cairo's Genizah and the work of Sa'adia Gaon. Nevertheless, the most relevant, as we have said, are the sources that she analyzed in her research. These sources are different works that were published in the Maghreb in the 20th century (written in Judeo-Arabic). These works are examples on how *Šarḥ* works have prevailed through the times surviving until today. In her presentation, the audience could understand the differences between sources –focusing in the translation model–that allowed García Arévalo to determine the transmission of the *Šarḥ* from the Middle Ages to Modern Times. It

was a pity that García Arévalo couldn't be in Córdoba because during the discussion that followed there were many questions related to her research.

The fourth session (Chair Mateusz Wilk) was the last session of the day. In that, Shari L. Lowin (Stonehill College, Easton MA) presented a contribution titled: "*The Jews say the Hand of God is Chained*": Q 5:64 and the Rewritten Bible in which the author explained how the same expression was transmitted in different ways. Professor Lowin also used in her presentation images where the hand of God appears chained. The combination between her talk and the images was very helpful for the audience to understand Lowin's research.

Esperanza Alfonso (ILC - CCHS, Madrid) presented a paper titled: *Arabic and the Study and Translation of the Bible in the Vernacular* in which she analyzed the numerous glosses that appear in a Hebrew codex preserved in the Bodleian Library. Alfonso took the Arabic glosses as examples to describe the translation of the Bible in Castilian and in addition it, showed the importance of this codex regarding its exegetical content. Finally, Esperanza Alfonso used Sa'adia Gaon's work together with other works (mostly Arabic versions of the Bible) to draw the transmission of the Bible in Castilian as a vernacular language.

In the last talk of the day, Meirav Nadler-Akirav (Bar-Ilan University - BAP), in her presentation *Yefet ben 'Eli's Commentary to the Book of Malachi*, analyzed 'Eli's work on Malachi's book regarding not only the relevance of this work but also the problems in understanding it to translate this work into English.

Thursday April 27th

The second day at the conference was dedicated to the Christian Arabic tradition related to the Bible. The first session, CHRISTIAN-ARABIC TRANSLATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS was headed by Samir Arbache (Université Catholique de Lille) who gave a talk titled: *Stafana de Ramla, copiste du IXe siècle, au monastère Saint Chariton*. As the title reveals, the talk was focused on this copyist who made a lot of works really interesting. Arbache was focused in the work Sinai Ar. 72, which colophon reveals the background and status of its copyist. Arbache

gave an interesting talk with the support of a handout that made his research easy to follow.

Miriam Lindgren Hjälms (BAP, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) was not able to attend the conference. Because of that, her presentation titled: *Towards a Codicological Categorization of Early Christian Arabic Bible Manuscripts* was read by Gregor Schwarb, chair of the session. Miriam Lindgren Hjälms tried to establish in her research a few steps that could be followed by researchers to date Christian Arabic manuscripts. This codicological categorization –as she referred to it– was based on a textual corpus of Arabic biblical manuscripts. Hjälms analyzed the writing characteristics, and the vocabulary used in each manuscript, among others elements that appear in this kind of corpus.

The second session of the day started with Pilar González Casado (Universidad Eclesiástica San Dámaso) who gave a presentation titled *Christian Arabic terminology in some Bible quotations*. The textual corpus used by González Casado allowed her to determine the new vocabulary that Christian communities in the Middle Ages used. These terms were created due to the challenge to translate the Bible into Arabic. During the translation process the writers had the need to create new words that didn't exist in the Koran but appeared in the Bible. González Casado analyzed in her presentation some of these terms that allowed her to draw the transmission of the biblical texts as well as to know the biblical version (and language) that each community used to create their Arabic Bible version.

Peter Tarras (BAP, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) with his paper *Arguing from Scripture: Extracts from the Summa Theologiae Arabica in a membrum disjectum of Sin. Ar. 155 (MSS Munich BSB Cod. arab. 1071 + Paris BNF Syr. 378)* showed the relevance of the apologetics commentaries that appear at the Ms Sin. Ar. 155 and also the importance of some folios held at the BNF and at the British Library. After that, Peter Tarras explained the codicological characteristics of this manuscript. Furthermore, his study allowed him to explain the history and the use of biblical texts as apologetic texts.

After a discussion period, the participants were invited by the organization of the conference to walk around Cordoba's Jewish Quarters to attend to a special talk. Camilla Adang (Tel Aviv

University) treated the audience to a talk about Ibn Hazm at the base of his statue. Adang described the importance of Ibn Hazm's work to understand the biblical tradition written in Arabic. She started with a brief background of the history of Cordoba and Ibn Hazm's life in this city to give the audience the perfect frame to understand Ibn Hazm.

The third session of the day started with Vevian Zaki (BAP, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich) after the break for lunch. Zaki gave a talk titled: *The Life Story of Manuscript Sinai Arabic 151* in which she focused on the story of Sinai Ar. 151. This manuscript has some folios that have been replaced and restored throughout the time. Because of this, Zaki's work explored the possible modifications to the original folios. Furthermore, Zaki offered an interesting study of Pauline's Epistles in the Arabic tradition giving examples of different manuscripts where the whole Epistles appeared, and of others where only a fragmentary version of them are found.

Sara Schulthess (*Vital-DH/Vital-IT, Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics*) presented her research about the manuscript Marciana Gr. Z. 11 (379). During her talk titled: *Marciana Gr. Z. 11 (379): A New Testament multilingual manuscript from a multilingual milieu?* Schulthess discussed the possible origin of this peculiar multilingual manuscript of the New Testament that was found in Sicily. She analyzed several elements in this manuscript regarding its writing and the vocabulary used by the copyist to try to draw not just its possible origin but the possibility of inferring information about Norman Sicily from this text.

Three researchers participated on the last session of the day. Mayte Penelas (CSIC, Granada) was the first to talk presenting: *Narratives of Samuel and Kings in a Christian manuscript from al-Andalus (Ms Raqqada 2003/2)*. Penelas analyzed the Book of Samuel and Kings at the Ms Raqqada 2003/2 taking into account the modifications made by its author. In Penelas opinion, the comparison between this manuscript and the Arabic Orosio (which is considered a source of this manuscript) was necessary to understand some of the modifications that appear in the Raqqada's manuscript. In order to illustrate this, she showed several examples that contributed to the understanding of the changes suffered by the original text during its transmission process.

The second intervention was made by Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala (University of Cordoba). Under the title: *'Prove the Torah in Hebrew and the Gospel in Latin' On the biblical quotations contained in the Andalusī Kitāb Tathlīth al-Wahdāniyyah*, Monferrer-Sala explained how taking several biblical quotations that appear in the *Kitāb Tathlīth* allows the researchers to draw the possible origin to the Ms Qarawiyyīn 730. To draw this conclusion, Monferrer-Sala had analyzed the quotations, tracing its origin and pointing it to a different source, which is nor Sa'adia Ga'on, Ibn Hazm or Christian Andalusian authors.

Finally, Geoffrey Kyle (University of Tennessee, Knoxville) gave a talk titled: *Scribe A of the Seville Bible: Arabic, Latin, and Eschatology* based on an Andalusian version of the Bible written in Latin but with several marginal notes in Arabic. Kyle focused in his presentation in one of the scribes who translated this Bible (scribe A) analyzing his marginal notes. The exhaustive study that Kyle carried out allowed him to understand the transmission of this biblical translation as well as pointing out the original Bible that this scribe used for his translation.

Friday April 28th

The last day of the conference was dedicated to the MUSLIM TRANSMISSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BIBLE. Camilla Adang (Tel Aviv University) presented a paper about: *The story of Joshua ben Nūn according to al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442)*. In this work, Adang explained the use of biblical texts in al-Maqrīzī's work combined with Koranic quotes and elements properly taken from the Islamic tradition. Finally, in her presentation Camila Adang explored the description of Joshua ben Nūn's battle passage that is really relevant for the Islamic tradition. Al-Maqrīzī's view on this passage is interesting due to –as Adang explained– there is not a direct mention of ben Nūn in the Koran or on the textual Islamic production.

Dennis Halft (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev) talk titled: *Notes on the So-Called Persian Diatessaron and its Author and Commentator* was related to the work of Giuseppe Messina. However, Halft focused on the interlinear commentary on Gospels that appears in the so-called 'Persian Diatessaron' since these commentaries didn't appear in Messina's work. Taking into account the new manuscripts evidence,

Dennis Halft studied the historical and social context in which the Diatessaron was translated and how it was transmitted.

The second session started with Mateusz Wilk's (Warsaw University) talk titled: *Prophets and Scriptures in the Islamic Piety of the 3rd/9th Century*. Taking Ibn Ḥanbal as a main source, Mateusz Wilk made an approach on the view of pre-Islamic Prophets in different sources. During his talk, he used several examples in which information about these prophets, especially information about Mūsā, Dāwūd and 'Isā, were relevant. His study was really interesting because the point of view of these prophets must be taken into account by scholars in order to understand an important part of the Islamic tradition that was in contact with biblical texts.

David Vishanoff (University of Oklahoma) gave a talk titled: *An Early Thirteenth-Century Recension of the Islamic Psalms of David: The Islamicized Style and Content of Istanbul Manuscript Fatih 28in* in which he presented his research about the rewriting of Psalm of David by David Zabūr. This translation and rewriting of the Psalm appears in several manuscripts. David Vishanoff described how the terms used in these versions demonstrate the intention of the author to islamized the text. This talk was of great interest to the audience that had several suggestions for Vishanoff during the discussion.

Finally, the closing keynote was presented by Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv University). She titled her lecture: *'He saw her bathing on the roof: the David and Bathsheba Narrative in inter-religious exegetical exchange and cross-cultural character development (from late antiquity to the Middle Ages)*. It was an interesting research study about this quotation analyzing different sources that allow Polliack to explain not only the transmission of biblical texts taking this example but the transmission of the Bible in general regarding cultural and social changes that the original texts suffered to be adapted to the needs of the readers.

After the closing keynote, Professor Monferrer-Sala thanked the participants for their contribution in this field of research and for attending the conference. In addition, Monferrer-Sala generously invited all the participants to enjoy a visit to the Mosque of Cordoba after lunch. Several participants took the opportunity to visit this emblematic building. A special example of Cordoba's Muslim heritage that today is being used as Catholic cathedral. The visit was really

interesting because there was a guide who allowed the participants to visit some parts of the Mosque that are usually off-limits to regular tourists.

The conference's schedule was followed by the organizing committee, with minimal modifications. There were some last minute modifications because some of the registered participants could not attend for various reasons. On the other hand, there was a last minute participant, Sara J. Pearce who presented her latest work *Judah ibn Tibban and His importance for the study of the Arabic Bible*, which was part of her last publication.

The atmosphere during the three days of the conference was a mixture of friendship and collegiality. These were three days in which the participants, who are colleagues, formally shared their research results. Meanwhile during coffee breaks, lunch or dinners the discussions continued. The idea to set the Q & A discussion period at the end of the sessions allowed participants to formulate good questions and share their opinions to contribute in each others research.

This conference was a clear example of how biblical texts were one of the most translated, copied and as a consequence, modified throughout the times. The three days of talks, each one dedicate to one of the monotheistic religions regarding their biblical production written in Arabic was the perfect combination to understand the history of the biblical Arabic versions.

We are so glad to have had the opportunity to attend this conference and to enjoy the fruitful discussions and participant contributions. It is clear that the researchers that participated in it, is a group of closed colleagues who appreciate this opportunity to get together and make the best of it.



Opening session with Prof. Monferrer-Sala and Prof. Corriente



Marzena Zawawska during her talk chair by David Vishanoff



Participants at the base of the Ibn Hazm statue



Dennis Halft during his talk chaired by Samir Arbache



The audience mostly composed of participants attending the conference



Discussion after a session



Meira Polliack at the closing keynote



Some participants at the Mosque