

# Six Leaves of the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna* in Hebrew Characters

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## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*Kalila wa-Dimna* is a collection of exciting moral stories written in a unique style, both in terms of narration and its technique of maintaining suspense.<sup>2</sup> The stories in *Kalila wa-Dimna* are based on an imaginary dialogue between animals, and each story holds another internal story, which holds another, and so on.<sup>3</sup> The book dates back roughly to the third or fourth century BCE, and it was originally written in Sanskrit. In the eighth century, a Persian version was translated into Arabic by ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Muqaffa’ (died ca. 756 or 759 CE). The original Persian copy has been lost though. *Kalila wa-Dimna* eventually became exceptionally popular throughout the world, which resulted in various copies and many translations, of which Hebrew, French, and Greek were among the oldest, produced around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The manuscript under the classmark BNF Arabe 3465, which is currently held in Paris, in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, is considered one of the oldest extant Arabic copies of this famous book. It dates to the early thirteenth century (1220 CE). The Cairo Genizah—which should be considered a plentiful source for the study of Arabic litera-

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2 \* This article was originally published as the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit’s *Fragment of the Month* for February 2021, where it appeared with the title: ‘*Kalila wa-Dimna*: T-S Ar.6.32 part of the Arabic book *Kalila wa Dimna*, story nine—‘*Ilād*, *Balād* and *Iirākt*’ (<https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/taylor-schechter-genizah-research-unit/fragment-month/fotm-2021/fragment-0>). It is reproduced here, slightly modified by the editors, with permission from Mohamed Ahmed.

3 Editor’s note: On other Arabic folk tales in the Cairo Genizah, see in the present volume, ‘*Qiṣṣat al-Ġumġuma*: An Arabic-script Version of ‘The Story of the Skull’ in the Cairo Genizah Collections’ by Magdalen M. Connolly.

ture—holds fragmentary works and numerous pieces of otherwise lost Arabic literary texts, including *Kalila wa-Dimna* manuscripts from the same period as BNF Arabe 3465. For instance, the well-known fragment T-S Ar.51.60 comes from a magnificent, illustrated Arabic copy of *Kalila wa-Dimna* (Baker & Pollack 2001, no. 7533 and plate 19), likely from the thirteenth or fourteenth century. T-S Ar.40.9 is from a separate illustrated Arabic copy (Khan 1986, 60), which likely predates T-S Ar.51.60.

In their catalogue of the T-S New Series, Shvitiel and Niessen (2006) spotted a single bifolium of *Kalila wa-Dimna* in Judaeo-Arabic: T-S NS 97.16, copied probably in the 12th–13th century. The newly identified Judaeo-Arabic manuscript for this article is T-S Ar.6.32. Its discovery doubles the number of known copies of the *Kalila wa-Dimna* that are written in Arabic in Hebrew characters in the Genizah. A more extensive find, it consists of six leaves (three bifolia), including headings of sections/chapters. This fragment was apparently part of a complete copy of the book of *Kalila wa-Dimna* in Judaeo-Arabic, which is now lost. Comparing the text in T-S Ar.6.32 to BNF Arabe 3465 reveals that the Genizah fragment preserves text from the story of Ilād, Balād, and Irākt, story nine in the Arabic *Kalila wa-Dimna*.

## 2 Judaeo-Arabic Excerpt

Reading the Judaeo-Arabic text, one can easily spot differences in comparison to the oldest Arabic copy preserved in Paris. To give an example, I compare here some lines from the two copies, first giving the Genizah fragment in its original form alongside a transcription into Arabic script:

T-S Ar.6.32 P2 f. 2 recto

Translation	Arabic transcription	Hebrew script	Line
The king addresses Bmābrūn:	الملك يخاطب بمأبرون	אלמלך יכאטב במאברון	13
“I was asleep on the back of my clothes until I heard six voices	كنت نائما علا ظهر اتواي فسمعت من ال أرض ٦ أصوات فاستيقظت ثم	כנת נאימא עלא טהר אתואבי פסמעת מן אל ארץ ו אצואת פאסתיקטת תם	14 15
coming from the ground. Then I continued my sleep	عدت فأعقبت	عدת פאעקבת	
and I had 8 dreams, which I told the Brahmin about. They interpreted them for me	٨ أحلام فحدثت بها ال برهمن فعبروها	ח אחלאם פחדדת בהא אל ברהמין פעברוהא	16

(cont.)

Translation	Arabic transcription	Hebrew script	Line
and I am worried about this, and I did not wish to be extinct and to lose my	وأنا خائف من د[ل]ك وأشفتت أن أهلك ويعطب	ואנא כאיף מן ד[ל]ך ואשפקת אן אהלך ויעטב	17
kingdom". He told him about his dream, and so Bmābrūn interpreted it	ملكي وقص عليه [ر]ويه ففسرها فقال	מלכי וקץ עלי[ר] ויאה פפסרהא פקאל	18
for him: "You should not be sad, my Lord, for what you saw,	بما [بر]وان لا [ت]حزن يا هو الملك لما رايت	במא[בר]ון לא [תח]זן יא יהו <sup>4</sup> אלמלך למא ראית	19
and you should not let worries arise in your heart because of this dream. Because, there is nothing	ولا يخلجوا في صدرك منها شيا فانه لا	ולא יכתלגו פי צדרך מנהא שיא פאנה לא	20
going to harm you or reach you. As for the two fishes ...	يصيبك مكروه ولا يصل اليك أما السمكان	יעיבך מכרוה ולא יצל אליך אמא אל סמכטאן	21

We find the same part of the story in the following pages of BNF Arabe 3465:

BNF MS. Arabe 3465, fol. 132r:

فقال له الحكيم: ما بالك أيها الملك وما لي  
أراك متغير اللون فقال له الملك إني رأيت في المنام ثمانية أحلام فقصصتها

BNF MS. Arabe 3465, fol. 132v:

على البراهمة وأنا خائف أن يصيبني من ذلك عظيم أمر مما سمعت  
من تعبيرهم لرؤياي وأخشى أن يغضب مني ملكي أو أن أغلب عليه فقال  
له الحكيم إن شئت اقصص علي احلامك وان شئت قصصتها عليك واخبرتك  
بما رايت جميعه قال الملك بل من فيك اخبر فقال لا يحزنك أيها الملك هذا

BNF MS. Arabe 3465, fol. 133r:

الأمر ولا تخف منه أما تفسير السمكتين ...

Although the main storyline remains the same in the two versions, the comparison reveals considerable differences between the two texts. Personal names

4 This could be read as an abbreviation of *אלמלך יא איהא*, meaning 'my Lord'.

are among the main differentiators here. Take, for example, the name of the wise man (*al-Ḥakīm*), who was called *كباريون* *Kbāryūn* in the BNF Arabic-script MS. He takes the name *במאברון* *Bmābrūn* in the Genizah fragment T-S Ar.6.32. This is not the only name that is distinctive in the two versions. The main character in the story also holds two completely different names. In the Arabic script, she is called *إراخت* *Īrākt*, but in the Hebrew script she is *אבלאד* *Ablād*. The second distinctive feature in the Judaeo-Arabic version is the incorporation of some Hebrew elements within the text. For instance, the writer used Hebrew numbers in the text (*ח אהלל א* or '8 dreams'), which is common in Judaeo-Arabic texts in general.

### 3 Conclusion

Hopefully, further investigation will reveal more distinctive features of the Judaeo-Arabic text. The initial analysis suggests that the Judaeo-Arabic text might have been copied from another Arabic-script copy, but it could be that it was directly translated into Judaeo-Arabic from a text written in a non-Arabic language. All in all, the Judaeo-Arabic version opens new avenues for questions about the original *Kalila wa-Dimna* text and the versions through which it was transmitted during the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

### References

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<sup>5</sup> The present author is working on a complete edition of the leaves under the classmark T-S Ar.6.32, with English translation and analysis.