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18th-Century Judeo-Arabic Documents from the Prize Papers Collection

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Abstract

The Prize Papers Collection held at the National Archives in Kew contains more than 280 letters and documents in Judeo-Arabic (Arabic written in Hebrew script) taken from the British cartel ship *Venus* in 1800. Most of the letters and documents belonged to Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, an Algerian Jewish merchant who travelled between Algeria and Europe on business during the late 18th century. This article introduces the Judeo-Arabic documents from the Prize Papers Collection. It applies a linguistic analysis to a sample of 15 letters and documents, and transcribes and translates three documents written in Arabic and Judeo-Arabic scripts.

Keywords

Judeo-Arabic – Algerian Jews – Prize Papers Collection – Arabic – Hebrew

Introduction

Three Algerian Jewish merchants, the brothers Moses and Simon Smagia and Mordecai Sarfate, were attempting to deliver some goods from Amsterdam to Algiers without success. *Venus* was a cartel ship which, after delivering French prisoners of war from Malta, was sailing from Marseilles to Algiers. Around the middle of the voyage, the ship ran aground at Port Mahon, Minorca. HMS *Pearl* came to the assistance of *Venus*. However, upon discovering that the passengers were subjects of the Dey of Algiers, the British declared them enemies and took *Venus* as a prize. Indeed, the three merchants and their goods had been taken two times before as prizes, once by the British, and a second time

by the French. The Minorca incident marked the third such experience. The merchants would never see their goods again.

The collection of letters taken from *Venus* was found in the United Kingdom's National Archives at Kew under the classmark HCA 32/1208. Described as 'Hebrew and Arabic writing,' and written 'in an unknown language,' these invaluable documents and letters have remained unexamined for more than 200 years. The documents captured in the ship number more than 280, and vary from business and private letters in Judeo-Arabic to legal documents in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as business accounts and more than 20 business registers in Judeo-Arabic. The collection also contains two small notebooks of accounts, one of which is mostly blank. Some letters, as well as two large notebooks of accounts, contain sketches of old ships. The collection also includes a few Hebrew legal documents. These documents must have been of great importance to the merchants, as they took them on their business travels to Europe. Most of the letters are in good condition, and many of them still have their red sealing wax with the merchants' private business trademarks in Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin.

All the letters were already opened when the author of this article discovered them. The documents had been given sequential numbers from 1 to 279 by a British court in the 18th century, without any consideration of language, script, or document date. The numbering system omitted some letters that were contained inside others, which suggests that the total number of documents may be higher. Some letters are short, while others are quite long. The most significant feature of the collection is that it holds a considerable number of complete accounts in Judeo-Arabic. Comparing these Algerian Judeo-Arabic accounts to the recent accounts¹ found amongst Arabic business letters in the Prize Papers Collection, reveals some significant findings relevant to the economic history of the trade of both Christian and Jewish merchants in the 18th-century Mediterranean.

The initial investigation of the letters focused on the general information in them, i.e., identifying the senders and recipients, correspondence addresses, and dates. The oldest letter is dated 1783, while the latest one in the collection is dated 1800. The analysis also shows that the Algerian Jewish merchants mentioned in the collection were travelling across late 18th-century borders between five main cities in four countries: Algiers and Constantine (Algeria), Tunis (Tunisia), Livorno (Italy), and Marseilles (France). For instance, within

1 A considerable number of business accounts attached to the 18th-century Arabic letters have been found in the Prize Papers Collection.

less than a decade (1791–98), Shlomo Bū Sha‘ra alone received and sent letters from all five cities.

Although Shlomo Bū Sha‘ra was not on the ship with the other three merchants, a considerable number of the letters in the collection were sent between Abraham Bū Sha‘ra and his son Shlomo; indeed, the initial survey of the collection shows that Abraham wrote a total of 68 letters to Shlomo. From the dates of the letters (1791–1798), the Abraham Bū Sha‘ra mentioned in them might have been the leader of the Jewish community (Ar. *muqaddam*) in Algeria at the time, before he was replaced by Busnach in February 1800 (Rosenstock 1952:344). The Bū Sha‘ra (or Bouchara) family was amongst three famous Jewish families who emigrated from Livorno to Algeria in the early 18th century (Hirschberg et al. 1974:28).² Further investigation of the entire collection will provide more information about the identities of Abraham Bū Sha‘ra and others.

The current author is in the process of editing the entire collection in order to make it accessible in a series of edited editions with English translation and apparatuses.³ This article investigates a sample of fifteen letters linguistically, with an English translation and Arabic transliteration for three letters from the collection.

Review of the Literature

Mercantile Mediterranean history has primarily been based on medieval and more recent sources from the Cairo Genizah collections, with a heavy focus on the 10th–13th and 18th–19th centuries (Goitein 1967–1993; Goitein & Friedman 2008). Moreover, while the bulk of research on Judeo-Arabic has focused on Moroccan and Tunisian varieties (Arévalo 2014; Bar-Asher 1978; Brunot & Malka 1939; Brunot & Malka 1940; Heath 1989, 2013; Heath & Bar-Asher 1982; Henshke 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Leslau 1945; Stillman 1988; Zafrani 1967), few studies have been done of Algerian Judeo-Arabic (Cohen 1912; Tirosh-Becker 2011; Tirosh-Becker 2015; Tirosh-Becker 2017).

The work and efforts of Yosef Ben David Renassia⁴ (1879–1962) are prominent in the history of Judeo-Arabic literature in Algeria. The scope of his work spans more than 100 volumes, including *sharḥ* traditions, commentaries,

² For more information see Ayoun.

³ A book contract has been signed with Brill, entitled *Judaeo-Arabic Documents Intercepted in the Year 1800: Prize Papers on Three Algerian Jews and the Ship ‘Venus’*.

⁴ Also spelled *Ghanssia* in some sources.

dictionaries, and more (Tirosh-Becker 2012). While there are a few extant Judeo-Arabic sources from that time, his extensive literary project has preserved the culture of Algerian Judeo-Arabic (Tirosh-Becker 2011). The translation of a considerable number of Jewish sacred books, such as the Mishnah and *Mishneh Torah* by Maimonides, was one of the activities that preserved Jewish heritage from 19th–20th-century Algeria.

Bearing in mind that the majority of Judeo-Arabic literature is mainly related to Judaism, such as the literary work of Rabbi Renassia and other Algerian authors, the most significant feature of the Prize Papers Collection is that it introduces a different type of texts. As it is an entirely new source, the collection provides a novel avenue of research to study Algerian Judeo-Arabic, and Algerian and North African Jewish history, language, and culture during the 18th century, and promises to have a significant academic impact on both Arab and Jewish studies. Moreover, using this new source for comparative purposes will shed light on materials in other collections, such as the Cairo Genizah collections.

Judeo-Arabic and Arabic Documents in the Prize Papers Collection

The Corpus

A sample of 15 letters and documents from the collection has been linguistically investigated. The analysis includes the linguistic features of the letters, i.e., orthography, morphology, and grammar. Hebrew elements incorporated into the letters are also briefly discussed as an example of written code-switching. A short comparison between the letters in the sample and letters from the Cairo Genizah with regard to the opening formulae of the letters is also provided.

Most of the letters are directly connected to Shlomo Bū Sha'ra. The collection holds many letters between Shlomo and his father Abraham Bū Sha'ra, which discuss both business and family and personal matters. The initial analysis of the letters shows that Shlomo Bū Sha'ra received letters in Algeria between 1791 and 1796. Other letters written between 1797 and 1798 are addressed to Marseilles.

One of the legal documents in the collection, document HCA 32/1208.166, shows how vital mobility was for Jewish merchants, facilitating their negotiations while they maintained their businesses back home. The document, written in Arabic script, is a rental contract for a hotel that mentions the names of two Jewish tenants, Bū Sha'ra and Bū Sh'isha, and was issued by Salah Bey Ben Moṣṭafa (1725–1792), the Ottoman Bey of the city of Algiers at the time. The contract is for one year, issued in the middle of the month *dū al-Ḥijja* 1203 AH

TABLE 1 Preliminary corpus of documents

Classmark	Sender, address	Recipient, address	Date
HCA 32/1208.7	Yosef 'Ammār, Algiers	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Tammuz, 1796
HCA 32/1208.9	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Avraham Bū Sha'ra, Algiers ⁵	Adar, 1796
HCA 32/1208.10	Moshe Toubiana & Yosef Navon, Algiers	Yūsuf 'Ammār & Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Adar, 1796
HCA 32/1208.15	Avraham Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Algiers	Iyar, 1791
HCA 32/1208.17	Yehoshu'a Beniste, Algiers	Avraham Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Shevaṭ, -
HCA 32/1208.22	Yehoshu'a Beniste, Algiers	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Menachem Av, -
HCA 32/1208.26	Shlomo Navon, Algiers	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Iyar, 1796
HCA 32/1208.83	Moshe Toubiana & Yosef Navon, Algiers	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Marseille	Cheshvan, 1797
HCA 32/1208.95	Moshe Toubiana, -	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Adar, 1796
HCA 32/1208.124	Shlomo Şemaḥ, Tunis	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Tammuz, 1796
HCA 32/1208.126	Shlomo Şemaḥ, -	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Kislev, 1796
HCA 32/1208.129	Shlomo Şemaḥ, -	Yosef 'Ammār & Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Iyar, 1796

5 The address of the recipient on the envelope is written in two forms. The city of Algiers is written first as לְדִזַּיִר, and it was written in another hand as אַרְגִּיל just below the first one.

TABLE 1 Preliminary corpus of documents (*cont.*)

Classmark	Sender, address	Recipient, address	Date
HCA 32/1208.131	Shlomo Şemaḥ, Tunis	Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, Constantine	Iyar, 1796
HCA 32/1208.143	Shlomo Şemaḥ, Tunis	-	-
HCA 32/1208.166 (a legal document)	rental contract between Salah Bey Ben Moşṭafa (1725–1792) who was the Ottoman Bey of the city of Algiers and two Jewish merchants; Bū Sha'ra and Bū Sh'isha, issued on 1203 Hijrī (September 1789 AD).		

(September 1789), and scheduled to come into force the following month. According to the contract, the two tenants paid a sum of 400 riyyāl for a period of one year. The contract also states that Jewish merchants visiting the city of Constantine from Algiers, as well as from other cities, are only allowed to reside in that building. Accordingly, as the document states, if any Jewish merchants from outside the city stay in other quarters or places, they will be severely fined and punished.

Grammatical Notes and Linguistic Features of the Letters

Orthography

The Judeo-Arabic letters in the corpus are written in Hebrew script. Due to the different number of consonants between Arabic and Hebrew, the convention of Arabic script lacks some equivalents. The writers follow an inconsistent system of convention, at times even in the same letter.

ال - al

There are few cases in which the ال ligature (ا) is used in the letters, e.g., באלִי ('my mind'), HCA 32/1208.9, recto, line 14.

ت - tā'

The Arabic consonant tā' is represented by ת and ט interchangeably, e.g., כטיר ('much'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, line 3; גיהט ('concerning'), HCA 32/1208.131,

recto, line 5; תרסל ('to send'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, line 5; תונס ('Tunis'),⁶ HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 8; ווסלתני ('and reached me'),⁷ HCA 32/1208.83, recto, line 3. The interchangeable convention of the /t/ consonant in these examples might reflect the *tafkīm* and *tarqīq* cases in spoken Arabic at the time. However, there is no clear evidence to support this claim, and it is hoped that further investigation of all the letters will provide new insights in this respect.

ض - dād

The Hebrew צ presents *dād* with a superscript diacritic dot, e.g., בייצה ('white'), HCA 32/1208.124, recto, line 20.

ج ، غ - jīm and ḡayn

The *jīm* consonant is represented by ג with an underdot, e.g., ויגיב ('and he brings'), HCA 32/1208.83, recto, line 15; גמייע ('all of'), HCA 32/1208.9, recto, line 12. However, the consonant *ḡayn* is represented by the letter ג with a superscript diacritic dot, e.g., גאלי ('expensive'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 8.

خ - kā

This consonant is represented by כ with a superscript diacritic dot, e.g., בלכיר ('in wellness'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 22. In some letters, the *k* and *k* consonants are both represented by כ without a superscript diacritic dot, e.g., אלכטין ('the two lines'), HCA 32/1208.95, recto line 3.

ف - fā

The *f* consonant is sometimes represented by the Hebrew letter פ with a superscript diacritic dot, e.g., כיפ ('how'), HCA 32/1208.15, recto line 10; פי ('in'), HCA 32/1208.9, recto line 14.

ه - hā

In North African Judeo-Arabic dialects, the eastern ones tend to delete the /h/ consonant in numerous contexts or replace it by a very weak hamza before a vowel,⁸ e.g., האד *hād* > *ād* / *ad*. An interesting feature in the letters is that this phenomenon is also shared by some Algerian Judeo-Arabic examples, e.g., the deletion of the /h/ consonant in the following forms: e.g., תרסלומלו.

6 The consonant in the word 'Tunisia' is written with ט in another letter, טונס ('Tunisia'), HCA 32/1208.9, recto, line 10.

7 In another letter, the same word is written with ט instead: ווסלטני ('and reached me'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 3.

8 For further discussion see Chetrit 2016:13–14.

(‘you send them to him’) HCA 32/1208.153, recto line 9, instead of תרסלהומלו; נטעך כודום ונטע משה רסלום (‘take your share and send over the share of Moses’) HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 19, instead of כודהום and רסלהום; ואווה (‘and he’) HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 6, instead of והווה.

This phenomenon not only appears in Judeo-Arabic forms or formations in some of these letters, but also in Hebrew ones as well. The Hebrew examples in the letters show how this phenomenon is deeply rooted in linguistic tradition, e.g., אבחור אנחמד (‘the charming young man’) instead of הבחור הנחמד, HCA 32/1208.153, recto, line 2.

Taking into consideration the deletion or the preservation of the weak consonant /h/ה in Judeo-Arabic and Hebrew formations, as it appears in the letters of this study, it is probable that the Prize Papers Collection reflects diverse linguistic traditions. Such is the case too for the uses of the possessive דיאל in western dialects versus נטאע/מטאע or נתאע/מתאע in eastern dialects of Jewish communities in North Africa (Chetrit 2016).

Word-final *matres lectionis*

The ending vowel /a/ is primarily represented in the corpus by the mater lectionis ה, e.g., עלינה (‘about us’), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 4; מה (‘what’), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 12; לה (‘no’), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, line 15. In a few cases, however, the final vowel /a/ is represented by the mater lectionis א, e.g., מא (‘what’), HCA 32/1208.95, recto, line 7; לא (‘no’), HCA 32/1208.83, recto, line 10.

Scriptio plena of Long Vowel /ā/

The long vowel /ā/ is represented in the letters by א, e.g., באש (‘so that’/‘to’), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 3; תעאוויד (‘to repeat’), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 6; ראני (‘I am’), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, line 7.

Scriptio plena of Short Vowel /a/

The short vowel /a/ is primarily represented without a *mater lectionis*. However, there are some examples of the short vowel represented by א, e.g., מאעו (‘with him’), HCA 32/1208.15, recto line 12.

Scriptio plena of Short Vowel /i/ and /u/

In another few cases, the short vowel /i/ is represented by the *mater lectionis* י, e.g., מין (‘from’), HCA 32/1208.95, recto, line 3. The /u/ short vowel is represented by ו, e.g., תרסלומלו (‘you (singular) send them to him’), HCA 32/1208.153, recto line 9.⁹

9 Both short /i/ and /u/ vowels are represented in other Judeo-Arabic texts by י and ו respectively. See, for instance, Khan (2013:244) and Blau (1980:21).

Definite Article **ال**

In general, the Algerian Arabic definite article **ال** is not fully pronounced when it is followed by a lunar consonant, which is reflected in the letters in this study, e.g., **לחרוף** *l-ḥrūf* ('the words'; literally 'the letters'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, line 22; **לכלאם** *l-klām* ('words'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 10.

The definite article in the case of sun consonants testifies to the assimilation of the **ل** in both standard and Algerian Arabic, which is also reflected in the Judeo-Arabic letters, e.g., **אסלם** *assalām* ('the greetings'), HCA 32/1208.153, line 3; **אסלמה** *assalāma* ('safety'), HCA 32/1208. 7, recto, line 26; **פסוק** *fassūq* ('in the market'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 14.

However, a few letters in the corpus do not follow the same rules concerning the definite article, e.g., **אלכולכאל** ('the anklet'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 5;¹⁰ **אסלם** ('greetings'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 3.

Verb

The present tense (yqtl) in the letters reflects some dialectal features of verb conjugation in Algerian Arabic and in North African dialects. For instance, the *n* prefix is used with the present tense for the first-person singular, e.g., **נעלמך** ('I inform you'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 3.

The present continuous is represented by the use of the particle *rānī* before the verb, e.g., **ראני נרסאלך** ('I am sending to you'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 7; **ראני נקלך** ('I am telling you'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto line 10. For the first singular plural, the circumfix *ne—u* is used in the present tense, e.g., **נסמעו עליך לביר** ('we hear good news about you'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 4.

The plural verbal ending *-ūna* in classical Arabic is shortened in the letters, e.g., the verb **יסלמו עליך** in this example: **וסגאר יסלמו עליך** ('young people are sending you greetings'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 9.¹¹

There are some examples in the letters of the verb *baqā* being used as an auxiliary verb, a common feature of Arabic dialects, e.g., **ותבקה תחרס תרסלנה** ('and make sure to send us'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 6.

Some verbal nouns in the letters reflect colloquial Algerian Arabic, e.g., **כתיב/כטיב** *ktib* ('writing of').¹²

¹⁰ The same word appears as **לכלכל** in letter HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 22.

¹¹ This phenomenon is common already in Medieval Judeo-Arabic texts; see Blau (1980: 68–70).

¹² Most of the letters in this study start with this verbal noun, followed by the date of the letter.

Demonstratives

The main demonstrative pronoun used in the letters in this study is **אד**, e.g., **ואד אונג חרופ** ('and these are the few words'; literally: 'a couple of characters'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, lines 6–7; **ואד לחרפין בקצור** ('and here are the few words in short'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 3. The demonstrative pronoun **אדי** comes before the plural noun, e.g., **נעלמך אדי כבאר עאן כואטך** ('we are telling you this news about your sister'), HCA 32/1208.95, recto, line 4.¹³

In some letters, the demonstrative pronoun is represented instead by **האד**, e.g., **והאד אלהרפין** ('and these two words'), HCA 32/1208.124, recto, line 3.¹⁴

Relative Particle

The relative particle used in the letters is **אלי**, which is not inflected for number or gender, e.g., **אלחריר אלי קולטלי** ('the silk that you informed me about'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 7; **אלקהווא אלי גאט מן דזאיר** ('the coffee that came from Algiers'), HCA 32/1208.126, recto, line 12; **בנג אלי נחסבו כיפ בני** ('your son whom I treat like my son'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, lines 7–8; **אלפלוס אלי רסל בן שמעון** ('the money that Ben Shimon sent'), HCA 32/1208.124, recto, line 14.

Possessive Pronouns

For the possessive construction, the particle **דיאל** is used with possessive pronouns in the letters, e.g., **דיאלו** ('his property'), HCA 32/1208.153, recto, line 12; **כתבלו עליה לכלכל דיאלי** ('write to him concerning my anklet'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 22. The particle **די** is used before nouns for the construct cases *idāfa*, e.g., **לאורדין די יוסף** ('the money order of Yosef'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 9.

Another method of conveying possessive construction is the use of the particle **נטעך בודום ונטע משה רסלום**, e.g., **נטעך בודום ונטע משה רסלום** ('take your share and send over the share of Moses'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto, line 19; **מאזשי מתאעך אד אשי** ('this stuff is not yours'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, lines 18–19.

Negation

Negation in the letters primarily follows negation in modern Algerian Arabic. The verb is placed within the circumfix *ma—sh*, e.g., **מא תשריש** ('do not buy'), HCA 32/1208.124, recto, line 10; **מא סרקשי** ('he did not steal'), HCA 32/1208.7, recto line 27; **מא יגיבוש** ('they are not bringing'), HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 8.

13 This spelling can also denote the singular, in which the *alef* denotes a short vowel a, as in **מאעון** ('with him'), HCA 32/1208.15, recto line 12.

14 The majority of Algerian Arabic dialects use the following demonstrative pronouns: *hāda*, *hādī*, and *hādū* before the masculine singular, feminine singular, and plural nouns respectively; see Daoud (2011:56).

However, the particle **לא** is also used before verbs in a few other constructions, e.g., **לא באש ירפד** ('not to reject'), HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 12; **מה באן לא** ('there were neither sellers nor buyers'; literally 'there was neither one to sell nor to buy') HCA 32/1208.22, recto, lines 20–21.

In a few other cases, the negation of the verb in the perfect does not include the use of the final *sh* suffix, e.g., **מקדרת תרסל** ('you could not send'), HCA 32/1208.17, recto, line 5.

In general, the cases of negation found in the letters are different from the negation in the Cairo Genizah late Judeo-Arabic documents (hereafter LJA). The main negator used with the verbs in the LJA is primarily the particle **לם** (Wagner 2010).¹⁵

Written Code-switching

Hebrew elements are a key feature of Judeo-Arabic texts (Leslau 1945; Bar-Asher 1992, 2013; Chetrit 1991; Heath 1989; Hary 1999; Wagner & Connolly 2018; Ahmed 2018b) and Algerian Judeo-Arabic letters are no exception. The letters from the Prize Papers Collection contain two main types of written code-switching, intra- and intersentential code-switching.¹⁶ Code-switching cases in the corpus are mostly used in formulaic abbreviations, in which the code-switch occurs on the boundary of the sentence.

Intersentential Code-switching¹⁷

בע"ה ראני נרסלך מטלוב
בע"ה ראני נרסלק מטלוב

'with the help of God, I will send your request.'

HCA 32/1208.95, recto, line 6.

See also:

וכאן תסטחקש חאגה אמרני נקציהא ושלום רב
وكان تسطحش حابه امرني نقضيها وشلوم رב

15 There is evidence from 18th-century Arabic business letters from the Prize Papers collection of the use of the particle **لم** as a negator; see Wagner & Ahmed (2017).

16 For further discussion about code-switching in written Jewish documents, see Ahmed (2016, 2018a, 2018b).

17 The cases of code-switching are underlined in the examples.

'If you need anything, please order it (and) I will do it, and **many greetings**.'
HCA 32/1208.131, recto, lines 16–17.

Intrasentential code-switching

וכיף אסאעה מזרובה ועירב שבת (ערב שבת)
כיף اساعه مزروبه וערב שבת

'Now, time is running fast, and it is **Saturday night**.'
HCA 32/1208.131, recto, line 15.

See also:

אנה ח'מ' מסלם עליך
אנה ח'מ' مسلم عليك

'I, **the one who signs below**, am sending you greetings.'
HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 3.

The Style of the Formulae in the Letters

A comparison of the opening words in the LJA business letters from the Cairo Genizah and the sample of Algerian Judeo-Arabic letters in this study clearly demonstrates some differences:

מן חמ' מסלם עליך ... סבאב אד אלכטין באש נעלמד ואיין וסלטני עאז ברתך ...

'From the person who signs below, the reason for these few lines is to inform you that I have received your precious letter ...'
HCA 32/1208.7, recto, lines 3–4.

Another example of a letter sent by two senders using the same formula:

מן חמ' מסלמין עליך ... סבב אד אסטריין נעלמד כיר נשלא וסלטני עאז בראטך ...

From the two persons, who sign below, who are sending you greetings. The reason for these few lines is to inform you in all wellness, God willing, that your kind letter has arrived.
HCA 32/1208.83, recto, lines 3–4.

Another common formula in the Prize Papers Collection is:

לברה ולך מן ענדי אנה ח'מ' מסלם עליך כטיר מן אלסלם ובעד אלסלם ...

This letter is to you from me, the one who signs below, who is sending you many greetings. After (expressing) greetings ...

HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 3.

Another formula from the Prize Papers Collection is similar to a letter from the LJA:

אחדש'ו מן בעד כטרט אסלאם עליך ... והאד אחרפין בקצור באש נעלמך לכיר ...

After sending you many greetings ... these are a few words to inform you in wellness that ...

HCA 32/1208.124, recto, line 3.

Most of the opening words in the LJA start with the Hebrew formulaic abbreviation אחדש'ו or אחרי דרישת שלום ('after expressing greetings'), (Khan 2013; Wagner 2010).

Edition of Some Selected Documents

Letter HCA 32/1208. 131

The letter in Hebrew characters

Recto

1. בע"ה (בעזרת ה')¹⁸ תונס יום י"ב ל"ח אייר ש" ה"תקנ"ו
2. אלסניור שלמה אבושערה יצ"ו (ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו)
3. אחדשו (אחרי דרישת שלום) מן ח"מ (חתום מטה) מסלם עליך ד"ש (דרישת שלום) ואד לחרפין בקצור באש נעלמך
4. אלי וצלטני עז בריאטך וערפט מא פיהא ומנהא פרחט
5. נסמע ביד טייב ת"ל (תודה לאל) מן גיהת אלכולכאל יאסידי חאטה
6. לליום ואווה ענד אדלאל ומה גא מן טלבו אלי וידא באש
7. לקודאם וסווה נכברך ומן גיהת אחריר אלי קולטלי פי

¹⁸ Explanations of the Hebrew and Aramaic abbreviations are provided in parentheses by the author of this paper.

8. תונס מא יגיבוש אד אנוכט¹⁹ ואלאפיון אליוס גאלי ואמה
9. לליוורנו רסלטלכום לאורדין די יוסף נאבון תסעה מית
10. וסבעה וארבעין ריאל רוזה פי סבט קבילט פסאבק ברייה
11. מן דזאיר מן משה טוביאנה ויוסף נבון באש נרסל
12. כול מה תרסלולי לליוורנו וראני מה כאליטש למיטין
13. ריאל נוואסר באש תבקאוו עלה באלי ואמה לפצלה דלך
14. אלי טלבטלי ראני קאעד נקארע פסוק באש נשריהאלך
15. חאגה טייבה וכיפ²⁰ אסאעה מזרובה ועירב שבת (ערב שבת) ולבריה
16. מטולה מה נקדרש נטוול עליך וכאן תסטחקש חאגה
17. אמרני נקציהא ושלוס רב ע"ה (עבד ה') שלמה צמח
18. ס"ט (סיפה טב)²¹

Verso

בע"ה (בעזרת ה')
 אלסניור שלמה בושערה יצ"ו (ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו)
 פי קזמטינה בע"ה (בעזרת ה') ופג"ן (פורץ גדר ישכנו נחש)

Arabic Transcription²²

Recto

1. בע"ה תונס יום י"ב ל"ח אيار ש"ה תקנ"ו
2. السنيور شلومه أبو شعره יצ"ו
3. אחדש"ו מן ח"ט مسلم عليك د"ש וاد لحرفين بقصور باش نعلمك
4. الي وصلطتي عز برياطك وعرفط ما فيها ومنها فرحط
5. نسمع بك طيب ت"ל מן גיהת الخولخال ياسيدي حاطه
6. لليوم واووه عند ادلال ومه جا من طلبو الي ويذا باش
7. لقودام اوسووه نخبرك ومن جيهت الحرير الي قولطي في

19 Note the replacement of the consonant /n/ with /l/.

20 וכיפ is repeatedly used in some letters wherever the writer starts a new topic. Another term that has the same function in the letters is וליוס. The function of וכיפ and וליוס is similar to the use of والحال in the Arabic business letters from the Prize Papers Collection; see Wagner & Ahmed (2017:401). The same holds true for the LJA business letters חאל; see (Rylands Genizah Collection L 205, recto, line 14).

21 Aramaic סיפה טב (*sefeh tab*), meaning 'may the rest of his life be good.' Other forms of this formula are ס"לט / סי"לט, i.e., סיפה לטב, with the same meaning.

22 I have transcribed the letters into Arabic to make it possible to compare them to other contemporary texts and to make them accessible to Arabists unfamiliar with the Hebrew script. I follow the methodology used by Diem in this regard; see Diem (2014).

8. تونس ما يجيوش ادا نوكت والا فيون اليوم غالي وامه
9. ليفورنو رسلطلكوم لا وردين دي يوسف نابون تسعه ميت
10. وسبعه وأربعين ريال روزه في سبط قبيط فسابق بريه
11. من دزير من مשה טוביאנה ويوسف نابون باش نرسل
12. كول ما ترسلولي ليفورنو وراني مه خالطش لمطين
13. ريال نوواسر باش تبقاوو عله بالي وامه لفضله ذلك
14. الي طلبلي راني قاعد نقارع فسوق باش نشريها لك
15. حاجه طيبه وكيف اساعه مزروبه وليرب شבת وولبر يه
16. مطوله مه نقدرش نطوول عليك وكان تسطحش حاجه
17. امرني نقضيه وسلمو رب ع"ה שלמה צמח
18. ס"ט

Verso

בע"ה
 السنيور שלמה بوشعרה יצ"ו (ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו)
 في قزمطينه בע"ה (בעזרת ה') ופג"ן (פורץ גדר ישכנו נחש)

Translation

Recto

1. With the help of God, (written in) Tunis, on the 12th of Iyar 1796.
2. To Mister Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, may God protect him and prolong his life
3. After sending greetings from the one who signs below, and who sends you greetings, these few words are to inform you in short
4. that your kind letter has arrived. I studied it, and I was pleased
5. to hear that you are well, thanks to God. Concerning the anklet, dear sir, it is
6. still with the middleman until today,²³ and no one has asked for it. If there are
7. any future updates, I will keep you informed. Concerning the silk that you requested,
8. no one supplies silk at the moment in Tunis. Opium is expensive nowa-days. Concerning

²³ This may refer to a certain middleman who trades mainly in gold jewelry.

9. Livorno, I sent you the *Orden*²⁴ (money order) of Yosef Navon, which is of the value of
10. 974 Riyyāl Rosa.²⁵ Last Saturday, in a previous letter, [I received] a letter
11. from Algiers from Moses Toubiana and Yosef Navon, requesting
12. to send over everything you sent me to Livorno. The reason I did not keep the two hundred
13. Riyyāls [for myself] as extra expenses is to keep you in my mind all the time. Concerning the rest of
14. what you requested, I am doing my best in the market to buy it for you
15. in good quality. Now, time is running out, and it is Saturday night, and the letter
16. is going to be long. However, I would not make it long for your sake. If you need any help,
17. please let me know, and I will do it for you. Many greetings, (from) the slave of God, Shlomo Şemah,
18. may the rest of his life be good.

Verso

By the help of God

(deliver to mister Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, may God protect him and prolong his life (written) in Constantine with the help of God. And 'He who breaches the fence will be bitten by a snake.'²⁶

Letter HCA 32/1208.153

The Letter in Hebrew Characters

Recto

1. בע"ה (בעזרת ה') כטיב יום ח' יז פי אדר שיני
2. ליד אבחור אנחמד שלמה בושערה יצ"ו (ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו)
3. לברה ולך מן ענדי אנה ח'מ' (חתום מטה) מסלם עליך כטיר מן אסלם ובעד
4. אסלם נאנך סלטאנה ססלם [תסלם] עליך כטיר ודנינה וסטיטרו יסלמו
5. עליך יאסר וסגאר כבאר וסגאר יסלמו עליך²⁷ כטיר מן
6. לסלם ובעד לסלם וליום יא שלמה מושי עיב עליך טכאלי
7. ובוד פי גרגד באש יחב יזווג לכטך ונטי טרסל
8. תקאלו מאזלת מאקבתלוש לפלוס לוכאן תעלם תסלפום

24 This could be a Spanish loan word meaning order. In letter HCA 32/1208.153, recto, line 12, the Hebrew element אלפקודן is used in a similar context to refer to a money order.

25 Possibly a kind of riyyāl.

26 Kohelet-Ecclesiastes (10:8).

27 The repetition of the word סגאר is found in another letter in the collection written by the same addresser: Letter HCA 32/1208.22, recto, line 9.

9. מן ענדך לאזם תרסלומלו לאיין מאקו מא בקה זמאן
10. חרס מן כל בד ולה בד יא שלמה אנה סמעת ביוסף
11. בינשתי ענאבי ראיי פי קסמטינה וידה ראיי פי
12. קסמטינה קאלו אלפקודן דיאלו ענד אלחכאם אדי
13. ארם ישראל וידה סאפר לענבה ארסלו ברייא וקאלו
14. לחרופ בקסור ולה רית באש נטול עליך אלה בלכיר
15. שלם רב ע'ה' (עבד ה') ישועה בינשתי
16. ס ט (סיפה טב)

Verso

ליד אבחור אנחמד שלמה
בושערה
מן גזאייר לקסמטינה
פגיון (פורץ גדר ישכנו נחש)

Arabic Transcription

Recto

1. בע"ה (בעזרת ה') קטיב יום ח' 17 פי אדר שיני
2. ליד | בחור | נחמד שלמה בושערה יצ"ו (ישמרהו צורו ויחיהו)
3. לברه ולק מן ענדי אנה ח'מ' (חתום מטה) مسلم عليك كطير من اسلم وبعد
4. اسلم نانتك سلطانه سسلم [تسلم] عليك كطير وذنيه وسطيطرو يسلمو
5. عليك ياسر وسغار بكار وسغار يسلمو عليك كطير من
6. لسلم وبعد لسلم وليوم يا שלמה موשי عيب عليك طخالي
7. وبوك في غرغد باش يحب يزوج لخطك ونطي طرسل
8. تقالوا مازلت ماقتلوش لفلوس לוקאן تعلم تسلفوم
9. מן ענדך לאזם תרסלומלו לאיין מא בקה זמאן
10. חרס מן כל בד ולה בד יא שלמה אנה סמעת ביוסף
11. בינשתי ענאבי ראיי פי קסמטינה וידה ראיי פי
12. קסמטינה קאלו אלפקודן דיאלו ענד אלחכאם אדי
13. ארם ישראל וידה סאפר לענבה ארסלו ברייא וקאלו
14. לחרופ בקסור ולה רית באש נטול عليك اله بلخير
15. שלם רב ע'ה' (עבד ה') ישועה בינשתי
16. ס ט (סיפה טב)

Verso

ליד | בחור | נחמד שלמה
 בושערה
 من جزائر لقسمطينه
 פג"ן (פורץ גדר יִשְׁכְּנוּ נחש)

Translation

Recto

1. By the help of God written on the 17th of Adar the second.
2. To the hands of the nice young man Shlomo Bū Sha'ra, may God protect him and prolong his life.
3. This letter is for you from me, the one who signs below, with many greetings. After
4. greetings, your Grandmother Sulṭānah sends you many greetings. Zvena and Stetro send
5. you many greetings. All your friends, including children and adults, send you many
6. greetings. After (expressing) greetings, now Shlomo it is a shame that you send a letter
7. to your father, while he is in Gharghard²⁸ arranging for your sister's engagement, telling
8. him that you did not collect the money [he wants]. If you can provide
9. the money at your end, you must send it over to him because there is not much time left.
10. Be careful in all matters. You, Shlomo, must have heard that Yosef
11. Beniste Aannābī is now in Constantine and if he travels to
12. Constantine, you inform him that his money order is with the Rabbi
13. Aram Israel. And if he travels to Annāba,²⁹ you should send him a letter and inform him.
14. Words are brief, and I would not add more for your sake but kind words.
15. Many greetings. (From) the slave of God, Yehoshua' Beniste,
16. may the rest of his life be good.

Verso

To the hands of the nice young man Shlomo
 Bū Sha'ra

²⁸ A place name, it might refer to the Djurdjura region in Algeria.

²⁹ Annaba is a coastal city in Algeria.

From Algiers to Constantine

'He who breaches the fence will be bitten by a snake'³⁰

Letter HCA 32/1208.166

Arabic Transcription

Recto

1. الحمد لله هذا امر صادر من المعظم الارجع
2. الهمام الانبع مولانا السيد صالح باي اعزه
3. الله تعالى بمنه امين يستفي بيد خديمنا
4. الذي بو شعره والذي بو شيعشه
5. على انهما اكثرنا منا فندق³¹ الجامع
6. الأعظم المعروف بسيد الكثاني
7. الذي احدثنا بناءه باربعاه ريال 400
8. لسنة التاريخ وتكلموا معنا بان جميع
9. اليهود الذين يأتون من الجزائر وسائر
10. البلدان لا ينزلون بمحل اخر سوى
11. في فندقهم هذا والذي ينزل في موضع
12. اخر تلزمه العقوبة الشديدة وعلى
13. هذا العمل وكتب عن اذن المذكور اعلاه
14. دام عزه وعلاه لا واسط حجي الخير
15. سنة 1203

Right Margin

1. بان ييدا كرايهما محرم الحرام
2. سنة التاريخ

³⁰ Kohelet-Ecclesiastes (10:8).

³¹ The *fā'* letter has a diacritic dot below the letter in the fragment. This is a typical 18th-century Moroccan feature when writing the *fā'*. See Beaussier's dictionary (1887).

Translation

Recto

1. Thanks to God. This is an order issued by the glorified
2. the courageous and noble, our lord Mister Saleḥ Bey, may
3. God exalted support him with his generosity, amen. This is in the hands of the servant
4. the *ḍimmī* Bū Sha‘ra and Bū Sh‘īsha
5. that the two of them rented the Hotel of the
6. Grand Mosque, known as ‘Sayyed Al-Kattānī,’
7. which we renewed, with a total rental value of 400 riyyāls
8. for one year. The two have made an agreement with us stating
9. that the Jews coming from Algiers and other
10. cities will not be staying in other places except
11. for this Hotel. Anyone who stays in other
12. places will be heavily charged. The business has been agreed to
13. according to the aforesaid. Written, on behalf of the aforementioned
14. May God prolong his glory and power, in mid-*Ḍu al-Ḥijjah*
15. In 1203 (September, 1789)

Right Margin

1. so that they start the rental period from Muḥṛram (the following month)
2. this year.

Conclusion

The discovery of the Algerian Judeo-Arabic documents in the Prize Papers Collection is revelatory. These invaluable documents provide a new source with which to study the language, culture, and socioeconomic history of the Algerian Jews during the late 18th century. With 280 letters, the collection offers a unique opportunity to study them alongside other sources of Judeo-Arabic and Arabic business letters from the late Ottoman period, e.g., the Cairo Genizah and the 18th-century Arabic business letters from the Prize Papers Collection.

Keeping in mind that few comparable sources are extant from the same period, these documents are of great interest to linguists wishing to explore linguistic features of late 18th-century Algerian Arabic and Judeo-Arabic. A comparison of these features and others found in Middle Arabic will also provide new insights into Arabic studies in general.

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