A Qaraite Booklist from 14th-Century Jerusalem
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1. In recent years, booklists and other documentary sources that shed light on various facets of book cultures in West Asia and North Africa before the advent of printing have attracted increasing scholarly interest.[1] This blog post[2] delves into one of the rare booklists preserved in the Second Firkovich Collection at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg (RNL, Yevr.-Arab. I 2524, fol. 2r–v).[3] We will briefly highlight notable characteristics of this booklist and gather contextual evidence that will bring us a step closer to understanding its *Sitz im Leben* and offer a glimpse into the educational and intellectual culture it embodies.

2. Our booklist is biscriptal and bilingual (Arabic/Hebrew). It is recorded on a bifolium together with excerpts jotted down from an Arabic dictionary of Biblical Hebrew (fol. 1r–v). The recto (1r) pertains to the root *ענש, the verso (1v) to *עפל and *עצב. Within these three entries, (Abū Ibrāhīm Isḥāq) ibn Barūn (d. 1128 CE) is referenced twice. The recto also includes a short passage written vertically relating to rational and scriptural evidence showing why God's speech cannot contain deceptive elements.

3. The 37 entries in the booklist on fol. 2, cover multiple fields of expertise and are loosely organised by discipline and/or author[4]. They are arranged in three columns, which are not always neatly separated (and the first row on fol. 2r comprises four entries rather than three). In the following, we refer to entries with a code representing whether they are found on the recto or verso, their column, and the row or entry number (e.g., R-2-3 refers to the third entry in the second column of the recto page).

4. The entries on the recto page almost exclusively relate to works by major Qaraite figures of the 10th–12th centuries. The only non-Qaraite works are Seʿadyah Gaon's *Kitāb al-Amānāt* and *Šarḥ al-Qawāʿid* by Avraham ha-Daršan (13th c.), a commentary on the thirteen principles (*qawāʿid*) expounded in Maimonides's *Commentary on the Mishnah*, tractate Sanhedrin 10:1 (known as "Pereq Ḥeleq").

5. The first row of the recto lists several grammatical works by Abū l-Farağ Hārūn b. al-Farağ alongside Mišaʿel ben ʿUzziʾel's *Book of Differences between the Readings of Ben Asher and Ben Naftali*.[5] The remaining entries on this page relate to writings by major Qaraite proponents of Muʿtazilī kalām: seven titles by Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (among them a collectanea volume (*jamʿ*) of his shorter writings), a compilation of legal treatises by Yešuʿah ben Yehudah (Abū l-Farağ Furqān b. Asad) in an arrangement by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Sulaymān, the treatise on festivals from al-Qirqisānī's *Kitāb al-Anwār*, and two works by "Abū l-Faḍl" Šlomo ben David ha-Nasiʾ (Cairo, late 12th c.).

6. The verso page lists in the first row three Muʿtazilī treatises on theological fundamentals (*uṣūl al-dīn*; "*fī ʿilm al-tawḥīd*") by Muslim authors, including two works by Abū l-Ḥusayn [Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ṭayyib] al-Baṣrī (d. 1044) and an unspecified *Rebuttal of Seʿadyah Gaon* (*Radd ʿalā l-Fayyūmī*). The eleven entries in the following rows (V-1-2–V-2-5) of all three columns refer to commentaries on various books of the Hebrew Bible (Joshua, Judges, Kings, Twelve Minor Prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Psalms 1–41, Job, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Daniel) by Yefet ben ʿElī, Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, Tanḥūm ben Yosef ha-Yerušalmi, and others. Other than that, the page records the beginning of the *Book of Knowledge* of Maimonides's *Mišneh Torah*, the Mishnaic tractates Avot and Brakhot, part of an unspecified Arabic translation of the Bible, and an equally unspecified biblical dictionary (*Tafsīr al-alfāẓ*). The last entry on the verso page, *al-Ḥ[āw]ī fī l-ḥukm*, which is said to consist of "six books (*kutub*) in one [codicological] part (*juzʾ*)", most likely refers to the six books of David ben Seʿadyah al-Ger's *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī fī l-fiqh*.[6]

Codicological information about the entries

7. Twenty-eight entries close with a condensed ligature of the word *juzʾ* (جزؤ / جزء 'part').[7] On three occasions, it is preceded by the preposition *fī* and once it is followed by suffix ـَيْن (*-ayn*) denoting the dual form ('two parts'). Twice, the very same term is rendered in Hebrew letters.

جزؤ	في جزؤ	جزوين	גֿזוין < جزوين
passim	R-1-5; R-3-2; R-3-5	R-3-5	R-1-2

In relation to content, *juzʾ* may denote a part of a work. In reference to a material object, however, it refers to a codicological unit, namely the collation of one or several quires (*kurrās*, pl. *karārīs*).[9] One item (V-1-2), probably incomplete, is said to consist of "five quires" (*ḫamsa karārīs*), while another (V-2-5) consists of one (*fī kurrās*). Several books on the list are mentioned as showing significant traces of usage, including rare specialist items which may have been of considerable age. The condition of these items (V-1-1; V-1-4; V-3-3) is described as being deficient or incomplete (*nāqiṣ*; *nāqiṣ kurrās*; *nāqiṣ min awwalihi kurrās*). In one case (R-2-3), by contrast, a manuscript is highlighted as being beautiful and/or in fine condition (*ḥulw*).

Date

8. The latest compositions mentioned in the booklist, namely the scriptural commentaries by Tanḥūm ha-Yerušalmi (d. 1291) and *Šarḥ al-Qawāʿid* by Avraham ha-Daršan, date to the second half of the 13th century. On palaeographical grounds, the booklist may be dated to the second half of the 14th century (see below).

Script

9. The booklist is written in bi-alphabetical script. In principle, Hebrew words are meant to be written in Hebrew script, Arabic words in Arabic script. There are, however, numerous deviations from this rule. In cases such as this, when a Jewish scribe has not only used Hebrew but also Arabic script, it allows for palaeographical comparison with Arabic scripts and hands beyond the Jewish community, connecting this booklist to the broader contemporary world. Particularly strong comparisons with our booklist can be made to the numerous lists and wide variety of documentary sources in the Ḥaram al-šarīf collection in Jerusalem, which predominantly date to the 14th century. For lack of space, however, a detailed palaeographical comparison will have to be deferred to our ensuing article.

Scribe

10. Based on a palaeographical analysis of the Hebrew script, the booklist was copied by the eminent Qaraite physician and prolific scribe Abraham ben Moses ben Samuʾel ha-Levi ha-Ṣuḫnī (also read as ha-Ṣaḫani; al-Ṣuḫnī; al-Suḫnī), who was active in Jerusalem during the second half of the 14th century. He is thus coeval with the Jerusalemite Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Nāṣirī (d. 1387), whose library and book culture has recently been the subject of a book-length study by Said Aljoumani and Konrad Hirschler (2023b).

11. The Second Firkovich Collection includes numerous manuscripts in Abraham's hand. Some of them are described in pertinent reference works online and in print.[8] Abraham and his sons, who were heirs to a long family tradition of physicians and scribes, are also attested as authors and owners of manuscripts. While the identification of the scribe of the booklist may help us to more precisely locate it in time and space, its exact function is difficult to establish with any degree of certainty. Is it a list of manuscripts owned by the scribe that were endowed to the Qaraite community in Cairo or is it an inventory of books that the scribe found on the shelves of the Qaraite community in Cairo, Damascus, or elsewhere? It is highly unlikely that it was written by or for a bookseller, as it contains no information relevant to the book trade, such as prices, writing surface, binding, and so on.

12. More plausible is the assumption that the booklist served as an inventory of a private or public-synagogal library or book collection, or is simply a listing of books that were of personal interest to the scribe. There are several indications leading to this assumption. The bulk of the titles on the list are works related to the Hebrew language (lexicography, grammar), scriptural exegesis (biblical commentaries), theology, and law (legal codes, legal theory). Works by Qaraite authors are prevalent, but it also contains several compositions by eminent Rabbanite figures and Muslim savants. The books on the list thus belonged to a closed thematic collection which was either used in a communal scholarly environment or collected by a person who was part of that milieu.

13. More precise information will be gleaned if in the future we are able to establish a correspondence between extant manuscripts and the items recorded on the booklist. This task will, however, have to be deferred to another occasion.

References

1. E.g., Allony et al. (2006); Frenkel (2017); Aljoumani and Hirschler (2023a, 2023b), with much further bibliography; the website of the project Jewish Book Culture in the Islamicate World. See also this recent blog by Konrad Hirschler. ↵
2. This blog entry is a short version of our forthcoming article. ↵
3. B&W images are available at https://web.nli.org.il/sites/NLIS/he/ManuScript/Pages/Item.aspx?ItemID=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990001543240205171 (IMHM, F 55856). ↵
4. For a full transcription of the booklist, see our forthcoming article. ↵
5. In connection with Abū l-Faraǧ Hārūn's works, the booklist is briefly referred to in the footnotes of the introduction to Khan, Gallego, and Olszowy-Schlanger (2003), pp. xiii, n. 7; xxxv, n. 64; li, n. 82. ↵
6. See the recently published edition הספר הכולל (כתאב אלחאוי) לרʾ דוד בן סעדיה אלגר – מראשוני תקופת הראשונים בספרד, בעריכת יהודה צבי שטמפפר, בשיתוף: דוד סקליר, נסים סבתו, אליעזר רייף, Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2024. ↵
7. We are grateful to Konrad Hirschler and Said Aljoumani for reassuring us that it does not represent an alphanumerical value. ↵
8. In the SfarData codicological database, relevant records include https://sfardata.nli.org.il/#/manuscript/0R122 (RNL, Yevr.-Arab. I 11 & 117); 0B070 & 0B071 (BnF, héb. 283); 0B072 (BnF, héb. 284); 0R077 (RNL, Yevr. I 564); 0R124 (RNL, Yevr.-Arab. I 1346); 0R186 (RNL, Yevr.-Arab. I 1366); ZR070 (RNL, Yevr.-Arab. I 4529); 0R185 (RNL, Yevr.-Arab. I 4531). HebrewPal, a recently launched database of Hebrew palaeography, offers preliminary entries for Abraham ben Moses (https://www.hebrewpalaeography.com/data/scribes/109/) and Samuel ben Abraham (https://www.hebrewpalaeography.com/data/scribes/110/). See, moreover, Poznański (1918), p. 5, no. 15; p. 7, no. 28; p. 20, no. 117. ↵

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Gregor Schwarb researches the history of trans-denominational intellectual thought in the pre-modern Islamicate world. In the framework of the MAJLIS research project, he continues his long-standing work on manuscripts from the Firkovitch Collections at the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg. This includes the cataloguing of the Arabsko-Yevreski subsection of the Second Firkovitch Collection. A second project investigates the institutional structure and history of the Qaraite *dār al-ʾilm* in Jerusalem through the life and œuvre of Yešuʾah ben Yehudah (Abū l-Faraǧ Furqān b. Asad).

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