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### Judeo-Arabic: Cultural Symbiosis of the Jews in the Islamicate Context

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#### Abstract

*The present article studies the Jewish-Muslim intimacy through the Jewish language as a cultural space in the period of the medieval Islam. The Judeo-Arabic, as the technical terms of the Jewish language in this period and in the subsequent eras, was one of the many venues through which people negotiated the Jewish identity in the non-Jewish environments. This negotiation was the outcome of intensive meeting between the Arabs' culture and the Jewish-specific heritages since pre-Islamic era to the period of the medieval Islam in dialectical and contested way. The Arabic language in the Hebrew script was an example of this process. In this article, the author traces back the earlier encounter between the Jews and the Arabs in the proto-Judeo-Arabic, al-yahūdīyyah, which includes the Muslim narrative of both the Prophet Muḥammad and the Jews. Next, this paper studies a later period of the Judeo-Arabic development as a Jewish specific language. The author argues that the Judeo-Arabic demonstrates a cultural symbiosis and a frontier of interaction between the Jews and the Muslims marked by the way Muslims and Jews accommodated and contested to each other.*

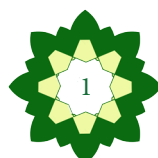
**Keywords:** Judeo-Arabic, Jewish-Muslim interaction, and 'Islamicate' context

#### A. Introduction: Jews and Early Muslims Close Encounter

The present article is dealing with the subject of Jewish-Muslim intimacy in the medieval Islam period through Jewish language, i.e. Judeo-Arabic. Disclosing this cultural space allows us to understand the complicated, though fascinating Jews and Muslims relations in earlier period of interaction. Modern day testified seemingly unredemptive enmity between the two communities, meanwhile historical account taught us a more multifarious way of relationship, in which positive and cordial were among the reality of interaction. The following elaboration is discussing Judeo-Arabic as a Jewish response in the non-Jewish context through which Jews strategized their position and creating a cultural

space for them to engage with the dominant culture, but at the same time demarcating their cultural interest.

One decisive event during Prophet Muḥammad mission of establishing Islam was his difficult encounter with the Jews of Medina. Earlier than that, exhausted by strong opposition by fellow Meccans to the extent of endangering his life, Muḥammad decided to take refuge to the north. Accompanied by his loyal followers, he left his hometown Mecca (Makkah) and migrated (*hijra*) to Yathrib, the former name of Medina, seeking a more conducive environment to survive his mission. Expecting the dawn of a new world order in the era of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*), from this point on he gradually transformed himself from a merchant and messenger to organizer and



strategist(Lawrence, 2006, Chapters 1 & 2); from a mere monotheist (*ḥanīf*) reformer to a prophet (*nabī*) of new religion.

In Medina, he institutionalized five ritual daily prayers, constructed the first mosque and other basic infrastructures to prepare for a more complex religious system; thus effectively Islam “proper” was born in Medina. And to ensure the bond among Medinan communities, i.e. Muslims, pagans, and Jews, he furthermore launched a charter or covenant, renowned as Charter of Medina that defined the relationship among groups and the obligations of each (Ibn Ishāq, 1955, pp. 231–233). Some say, it was the first secular constitution that embraced people of different religious persuasions (Durán & Hechiche, 2001, p. 92). Alas, despite its ideal ambition the charter soon be proven ephemeral. Tradition recorded that the Jews cheated the Prophet, thus in effect annulled the covenant. Instead of supporting the new prophet, the Jews however, demonstrated their dislike toward him as Muḥammad’s claim of prophetic mission was simply unacceptable for them, for they could not imagine a biblical-compliance prophet emerging beyond the traditional bound of Palestine (and Syria), let alone from Arabian desert. For Muḥammad, the resistance simply recalled his tribe, Quraish enmity toward Muslims in his first mission in Mecca. Besides, the social context of Medina overshadowed the incident was complicated, where conflicts, alliances, and realignments among Jews and non-Jews were rule of thumb.

After some failed political attempts to embrace Jews in the new society, the Prophet decided to subjugate them. He then succeeded to defeat the three largest Jewish communities of Medina: Banu Qurayza, Qaynuqā’, and Banu al-Naḍīr. The first was demised while the rest were expelled from the city. Banu al-Naḍīr, the expelled tribe, then joined with the Jews of Khaybar, apparently continued to become a threat to the Muslims.

The Jews of Khaybar was militarily powerful (al-Wāqidī, 2011; Newby, 1971, p. 218; Stillman, 1979, p. 134). Khaybarians were also economically strong. They lived comfortably in a rich oasis, controlled the trading road between Southern and Northern Arabia, and more importantly, owned a large scale date plantation. For that reason, dealing with them was inevitable

for the Muslims. Considering his powerful foe, Muḥammad sent his trusted men, to study the Khaybar defense. Infiltrating the line of defense and carry out the duty was virtually a mission impossible. Yet, one factor brought it a possibility that at last the mission successfully carried out.

Jews, according to the story, kept a custom to keep their door unlock at night, “fearing that a guest will knock, so that when one of them wakes in the morning, he has not received the guest. Thus he [the guest] finds the door open and enters and sups” (al-Wāqidī, 2011). This custom probably referred to the Passover tradition where the Jews keep the door unlock to wait the coming of Prophet Elijah spiritually (see Noy, 2007, p. VI: 335). This unique situation helps Muḥammad’s henchmen, led by Ibn ‘Atīk to slip stealthily into the town, locked all doors along the route, and arrived safely at one of the Jewish leaders’ (Abū ‘l-Rāfi) house. Ibn ‘Atīk knocked the door and responded to the housewife’s inquire in *al-yahūdīyyah*, “the Jewish dialect” (Newby, 1971, p. 218; Stillman, 1979, p. 17). She opened the door and by so doing sealed the fate of her husband. Subsequent events were ended with the complete defeat of Jews by the Muslims. A new kind of relationship was ensued afterward and probably, it was in Khaybar that the institution of *dhimma* was set out, which regulated the relationship between Muslim rulers and non-Muslim subjects under the term of *ahl al-dhimma* (“people under contract [of protection]”).

Related to the complicated relationship between the Jews and the Prophet, earlier Muslim historian, Ibn Sa’d (d. 845) records the story of Zaid ibn Thābit, the personal secretary of the Prophet. Once Muḥammad owned a “Jewish book,” *kitāb al-Yahūdi* (or *kitāb al-‘Ibrāniyya*) and he wished to read it. Therefore, he directed Ibn Thābit to learn the language, for Muḥammad, “*fa-innī wa’llāhim āmanu al-Yahūda ‘alākītibī*,” to show that he cannot rely on the Jews to be his scribes (Adang, 1996, p. 6; another version see al-Bukhārī, 1976, p. IV: 400). The reason the Prophet wanted him to learn Jewish language and scriptures might be related to political (and probably also religious) necessities. Following the order, Zaid ibn Thābit then learned it in seventeen nights! The real nature of *kitāb al-Yahūd* (or *kitāb al-‘Ibrāniyyah*) remained obscured, whether it was written in Hebrew, or Arabic in Hebrew script. The main problem was how Ibn Thābit

could learn it in a very short time. Nabia Abbott suggested that the text wrote in Arabic but in Hebrew characters hence IbnThābit only need to familiarize with the characters (in Adang, 1996, p. 6). On the other hand, Gordon Newby suggested that *al-yahūdīyyah* of the text must be a mere dialect rather than distinct language. It would not be difficult for IbnThābit to take such feat, since it was written in Arabic, and combined with his knowledge of other languages, such as Aramaic (Newby, 1971, p. 220). Other scholars were more skeptical on this matter. What would be convincingly accepted, however, there was interaction between the Jews of Medina and Muslims revolved in Jewish Scripture. It seems that there was a Muslim practice to consult to Jewish Torah and Talmud; a practice to which the Prophet strongly disapproved, though in one occasion he permitted ‘AbdAllāh bin ‘Amr bin al-‘Āṣ, one of his military leaders to read al-Qurān along with Torah. On certain occasions Muslim will come to a Jew to discuss scriptural matter and the Jew will recite Torah in Hebrew and Talmud in Aramaic, and further paraphrasing it into Arabic (al-Bukhārī, 1976, p. VI: 60/12; cf. IX: 92/460 & 93/632). Whether the Jews committing these activities into writing or the Arabs jotted down what they heard from the Jews, were remains uncertain (see Adang, 1996, pp. 6–8).

It is Ibn ‘Atīk mastery on *al-yahūdīyya* and “the script of Jews” in the second account that becomes the main concern of this article. In both cases *al-yahūdīyya* was a shibboleth to enter to the Jewish cultural space: physical and symbolic. Despite the well-integrated of Jews into Arabs society, there was a specific Jewish cultural production beside their Judaic rite that distinguished them from the rest of people, which is their specific linguistic code. There a territory resides between the Jews and Arabs, to which for the Jews, a border to safeguard their identity and privilege (as bearer of monotheism). The learning of the “script of the Jews” might be seen as a concession to which confrontation and accommodation was highly contested. In these accounts both Muslims and Jews were in transition and liminality. Muḥammad was in his critical moment to solidify Islam among the Arabs, meanwhile the Jews, as the indispensable minority was in critical position either, as their economic, political, and importantly,

religious privilege being challenged by a new emerging power of Islam. IbnThābit episode was but a small episode yet important to note, of the tension between Jews and Muslims on the question of continuity of Muḥammad’s message with biblical tradition, represented by Judaic scriptural repository. In many ways, as Islamic traditions attested, Muḥammad stood firmly on his religious conviction, that is the religious transformation he bears, based on God’s revelation is truthful. However, on the other hand he aware of the revelatory messages he endured has a strong interconnectivity with biblical tradition. Encounter at the frontier is not necessarily desirable. It could, as the aforementioned account, lethal. When shared protocol recognized it may be creating a new mutual understanding, but on the other hand, it also may be an invasion of the self.

Moreover, *al-yahūdīyyah* is considered as the precedent of the later relationship between Jews and Arabo-Islamic culture distilled in “Judeo-Arabic culture.” To this point, *al-yahūdīyyah* is considered as the proto-Judeo-Arabic and paradigmatic model of the subsequent dynamic interaction. As pidgin, it might sound distinctly Jewish in the ears of other Arabs however, but it was not as alien as to Hebrew or Aramaic (Newby, 1971, p. 219). In connection with it, Newby further offers a hypothesis that it was by way of *al-yahūdīyyah* many terminologies and expressions were shared by al-Qur’ān and Jewish (and Christians) sources. It thus discouraged former view shared by many Western scholars that Muḥammad simply “borrowing” it from the Jews and Christians (Newby, 1971, p. 221). If what Newby presentation was the case, then *al-yahūdīyyah* brings us two important issues to be explored further. Firstly, and the most obvious is that it gives us an understanding that Jews and Arabs relationship, at least in its Arabian context was very complex and in many points displayed a cultural intimacy. Secondly, it is interesting that *al-yahūdīyyah* became a proxy of religious language that catalyzed terms and notions from “alien” religious system, which pronounced in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac. Though “proxy” is sounded a passive role rather than active agent, it is useful in our discussion in understanding the interconnectivity of cultural differences. This point was apparently important in an identity

formative stage of a religious movement in its persistence to defend the “originality” of the message. Nevertheless, this process should be taken cautiously, since there was no sufficient historical evidence to have a better picture of such process.

## B. Jews and Arabs: Up Close and Personal

Long before the Jews and Arabs encountered at the time of the emergence of Islam in Arabian Peninsula, Jewish Bible (*Tanach*) relates many of its accounts with various individuals, social groups and territories with “Arabs” and “Arabian.” The famous story of Ishmael, which appears in contested manner among Abrahamic religious traditions, was basically an ethnonymic story, which later related to the origin of Arab tribes. It tells two sons of Abraham that Ishmael (Ibrāhīm and ‘Ismā’īl, in the Muslim tradition, respectively) is the ancestor of the Ishmaelite, while his half-brother Isaac (‘Ishāq), the ancestor of the Israelite, thus immediately contrasted the two, which later giving the precedence of the primacy of Israelite over “Arabs” by many Bible readers and commentators. Besides complicated history behind the ancient Ishmaelite and its connectivity with “Arabs” as social and cultural groups, in popular mind, often induced by religious fervor, through this account, people often trace the cultural and biological kinship of Jews and Arabs.

The story of Queen of Sheba (Bilqīs, in Islamic source) and King Solomon is another exciting (romantic) story that behind the text revealed the antiquity of political, economic and cultural relationship between Israel and Southern Arabia (Ullendorff, 1960, p. I: 1219-1220). The story that telling the ancient relationship between Jews and Southern Arabian (Newby, 1988, pp. 33–34; Tobi, 2007, p. XXI: 302). One of the stories of broken home in the Bible, the conflict between two brothers of Esau and Jacob is a myth of origin regarding the emergence of two competing nations, the Israelite and Edomite. Edomite was later identified as a Northern Arab people.

Those narratives were only examples of plenty other in the Bible. Some of them tend to portray the “Arabs” as the people on the periphery, with its nomadic features; the

perception shared by other ancient and classical Middle Eastern powers as well. Ancient powers such as Egyptians, Chinese, Greeks, Romans, Persians, and Byzantine, oftentimes constructed the “foreign elements,” “vicious and barbaric Other” that perceivably disturbed and intruded their civilization, such appeared in the designation of “Sea Peoples” in Egypt (see Singer, 1992), or “Xiongnu” in China (Gernet, 1996, p. 122). In the case of the discourse of “Arabs,” the Romans distinct *ager romanus*, the territory controlled by them, and *ager hosticus*, the territory of hostility beyond, to which lays *limes arabicus*, the frontier divided between Roman domain and Arabian land (Fattal, 1995, p. 71). This generic designation certainly less interested in the accuracy of cultural affinity among those people. Nonetheless, the Arabian Desert was not only a “hostile” territory but also a place of refuge for fugitive and persecuted party (Firestone, 2000, p. 181).

The earliest Jews existence in the Arabic setting beyond Biblical narrative is rather obscured (see Gadd, 1958, pp. 58–59; Newby, 1988, pp. 20–21). The picture little bit clear, when Roman Empire identified the territory of “Arabia” to signify a territory belonged to Arabs tribes, the Nabataeans and Idumeans (Josephus, 1981, Book IV, IV: 1; Kasher, 1988, p. 206). Christian’s Book of Acts in the New Testament recorded that there were Jews who came from Arab land (Acts 2:11). This Arab Jews along with other diasporic Jews at the time has a regular contact with the Jews in Palestine.

The connection between two communities besides legendary accounts is well attested by several evidences. One of them was that when Hassān bin Tibān As’ad Abū Karib the king of the most powerful kingdom of southern Arabia, the Himyar, around 384 decided to embrace Judaism (Moberg, 1924; Ibn Ishāq, 1955, pp. 6–7; Tobi, 2007, p. XXI: 302). It was almost natural that this political decision in turn mobilized the Yemeni Jews to social and political prominence. This episode was not only a religious event but should be understood in the larger social and political context.

Until the emergence of Islam in the sixth century, Arabia, particularly central and southern part was a political and religious theater of superpowers of the time. Christian



Byzantine and Abyssinia (Kingdom of Axum), and Zoroastrian Sassanid attempted to influence the locals. Byzantine and Sassanid was in harsh competition, which in many occasions lead to wars and often this rivalry radiated to their domestic proxies. So for example, Jews of Hijāz in the central part of the Arabian coastal was in many instances proxies of Sassanid, thus in hostile position with Byzantine.

Arabia was also a missionary field for Judaism and different Christian's groups, notably Syrian Nestorians and Egyptian Monophysite. Thus, in the fifth century, Arabia was a place of bitter conflict between Christianity and Judaism. The conversion of the aboveHimyarite royal family to Judaism was not only a religious champion of Judaism over Christianity, but politically (and militarily) provided firmer footing of Jews presence in the territory.

The last Himyarite king, YūsufDhūNuwas (reigned 517-525) and his fate, which recorded by Christians and Islamic chronicles, become the watershed of Jewish influence in Arabia. His attack on Najrān, the stronghold of Monophysite Christianity, turned out to be a disastrous campaign. By killing and persecuting the Christians who did not denounce their faith, DhūNuwas invited foreign intervention. Kaleb, the Christian King of Axum from Ethiopia took revenge, killed DhūNuwas and destroyed Himyar, thus put the strongest Jewish power ended.

Jews of Arabia, notably in Hijāz played important role in the trading and dominant in several cities along the trade route that connected Southern and Northern Arabia. The settlements such as Yathrib (Medina), Khaybar, Wadi al-Qurā, Fadak, Ḥegrā, al-'Ulā, Taymā, Tabūk, and the island of Yotabē, were predominantly Jews(Newby, 1988, p. 40). In the fifth and sixth centuries Arabia, Jews was either belonged to a clan and tribe, or present pervasively among the Arabs(Newby, 1988, p. 53).

At the time being a Jew means several things. Firstly, it meant ethnically and religiously Jew, and secondly, Arab convert. In certain instance assimilated to urban culture in Jewish city meant to become Jewish; though, it was not necessarily the Jews of the time were entirely urbanites since some of them also pastoralists, but the line divided both conditions often hazy(cf.

Newby, 1988, p. 52). In a more superficial reason, an Arab might be converted to Judaism through his mother that in certain occasion "used to make a vow that if their child lived they would make it a Jew (*tahawwadathu*), since they considered the Jews to be people of knowledge and the book (*'ilminwa-kitābin*)"(Newby, 1988, p. 53). Apparently, the pre-Islamic Jews were prominent in Arabian society and becoming a Jew also meant economic, political and cultural mobilization.

Furthermore, learnt from the process of conversion to Islam during Muḥammad mission that the whole tribe became Muslims when their leader converted, we may expect that parallel process might also take place regarding Arab tribe converted to Judaism. The emergence of Islam in part was a strong challenge to this Jewish hegemony and to a degree reconfigured urban landscape in Arabia.

Through this interaction there were several Hebrew terms or words that later appeared in Qur'ān, such as *rahmān* (merciful), *qurbān* (offering), *al-fir'aun* (Pharaoh), *salwā* (quails), *mann* (manna), *muqaddas* (holy), and Abraham that alluded to as "friend" (*khalīl*)(Hirschfeld, 1905, p. 432). In the Islamic tradition Abraham (Ibrāhīm) is called "friend of God" based on Qur'ān: "God took Abraham as a friend [*khalīl*]" (QS. 4:125), which recalled the Bible in Isaiah 41:8, "Abraham my friend (*'avraham 'ohavi*)."

When Islam spread out in the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain, Arabic was no more a marginal language, but it already a mature and developed language that standing in equal position with other civilization pacesetter, such as Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. The enthusiasm the Muslim Arabs displayed on their language, which began with Qur'ānic Arabic, overwhelmed the people under their influence, including the Jews and Christians.

On the other direction, further north, alongside the rich soil of the Fertile Crescent, Jewish society, which in its kernel the Talmudic culture flourished after the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem (in 70 CE). Under protection of more tolerant Sassanid rulers, the cities of Sura, Pumbedita, and Nehardea, in the arms of Euphrates and Tigris rivers of Babylonian land, became the center of Jewish learning, culture and politics, which slowly

replaced the older Jewish centers of Yavne, Tiberias (Tiverya), and Sepphoris (Sippori) in Palestine, which dwindling considerably under Romans and the Byzantine. This Aramaic and Persian-speaking Jews produced numerous Rabbinical literatures and Babylonia become the seat of *exilarch* (*reshgaluta*), the leader of Jewish people in Diaspora. The magnum opus of this culture was the codification of Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds (*Talmud Bavliand Talmud Yerushalmi*), around 450 CE and 500 CE respectively. Here in the Babylonia, the gravity of Jewish civilization resided, the place to which the world of Jewry, including the Arab Jews sought counsel. Despite the painful memory of the loss of homeland and the destruction of its temple, which Rabbis declared the Jews now in the state of Exile (*galut* or *golah*), the development of Jewish culture sought its maturity in Diaspora and in the interaction with other cultures.

According to a prominent Orientalist, H.A.R. Gibb, "No culture absorbs influences from another culture unless the two possess certain similar and related qualities and the ground has been further prepared by similar activities." He further asserts that "cultural influences are always preceded by an already existing activity in the related fields and it is this existing activity in the related fields and it is this existing activity which creates the factor of attraction without which no creative assimilation can take place"(in Lazarus-Yafeh, 2007, p. XI: 538). Middle Eastern cosmology in general tends to associate between script and cult, script and faith. To this, Muslims, Christians and shared cultural frame and values that ensured smooth communication and cooperation among them, which unique compare to other multicultural context, e.g. in Christendom(Lewis, 1984, pp. 77-78). Therefore, Jewish history in Arabia and its interconnectivity with the adjacent center of world Jewry in Babylonia were in continuum with Arabic culture thus fulfills the Gibb's demand. This context accordingly provided a solid ground for the Jews to respond to another watershed in its history, the coming of Islam.

Jewish Diaspora already expanded even far before the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE and continued massively afterward. The Jews have been present since classical times in some distance lands beyond their homeland of Israel, such as in

Ethiopia, North Africa and among the Berbers, Spain, Germany, Central Asia, and Indian sub-continent. In the places they lived, either for religious reason or for other reasons, such as economic, they interacted with the natives and often produces hybrid identity. These diasporic experiences in turn constructed complex and multi-layered identities that could not be easily singularized into specific Jewish culture, even though Babylonia, as previously mentioned, exercised religious hegemony over the world Jewry.

### C. Judeo-Arabic as a Symbiosis

During the course of history, the Jews reacted by two pattern of mode of relationship to the above situation. The first was cultural integration to the larger society, as apparent by the Jews of the Western countries. The second was linguistically and culturally separated from the rest of society, such as Judeo-German (Yiddish) and Judeo-Spanish(Lewis, 1984, p. 77). The above examples of Bible translation, in general followed the first model, to which the translation functioned as intermediary between the Jews and the Divine, as between the Jews and their cultural context. Likewise, the politics of language is a strategy of survival in Diaspora context, and further, an opportunity to advance their religious ideal, cultural imagination, and social agenda(cf. Gilman, 2003, p. 26).

In this article, there are two issues revolved in Judeo-Arabic culture. Firstly, it mostly refers to the Jewish culture in the Medieval Islam, roughly from the ninth to thirteenth century, that particularly reflected in the body of Judeo-Arabic religious literatures. Those writings mostly in Arabic but written in Hebrew scripts(Lazarus-Yafeh, 2007, p. XI: 538). This was not exclusively Jewish since the Christians exercised similar strategy that is for certain purposes they wrote Arabic in the Syriac script that was called *Garshuni*(Lewis, 1984, p. 78). It mainly refers to the Jewish language used by North African, Yemenite and Iraqi Jews, which still preserved until today by certain section of Oriental Jews (*Mizrahim*; *Mashriqiyyunin* Arabic) in Israel.

In modern times, Judeo-Arabic has been a language of low prestige using by Jews that

coming from non-elite strata of society (Myhill, 2004, pp. 118–119). In general, Judeo-Arabic is a creole of (Classical) Arabic, Arabic dialects, Hebrew, and Aramaic, which results in numerous mixed forms (Hary, 2003, p. 63). Important to note that each aspect, in fact, has been treated extensively by the specialists and here it will not be discussed exhaustively. On the other hand, the present article treats the issue simply to describe the dynamic relationship between Muslims and Jews and to understand Judeo-Arabic as the site of self-formation in Jewish diaspora context.

David Cohen argued that there was limited connection between Judeo-Arabic and religious (Judaism) or ethnic facts (Jews). Not only the usage was in large part “secular,” but also the linguistic structure has no difference with Arabic. Judeo-Arabic has not been, following to this argument, an independent linguistic reality. However, “it is possible, nevertheless, to bring out, at numerous points within the Arab domain, particular characteristics which within a certain locality serve to distinguish the usage of the Jews from that of their Muslim neighbors” (Cohen, 1960, p. IV: 299). Judeo-Arabic, like its prototype, *al-yahūdīyyah*, according to him is a marker of identity instead of independent language such as Hebrew and Aramaic. It is, practically a Jewish dialect of Arabic. All in all, Judeo-Arabic gave a firmer position for the Jews in Arab and Muslim’s setting, since it was derived from Jewish-specific culture and embedded to the Judaic tradition.

The affinity of Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic caused the Arabic-speaking Jews introduced less Hebrew into their Arabic. Yiddish, the Jewish language in Central and Eastern Europe absorbed Hebrew more than the Judeo-Arabic, because indeed, the knowledge of Hebrew was far more developed in this area rather than in Europe, so that the Arab Jews did not mix the two languages (Goitein, 2005, p. 133).

While the Jews abandon Hebrew and Aramaic as spoken languages during the first centuries of Muslim rule, and they survived only in liturgy, scholarship and loan words, the similar case also occurred among the Christians. All subjects in new Muslim context, whether they converted to Islam or not, adopted Arabic and Arabic culture. The process of Arabization was come in two ways, i.e. through the intensification

of Arabs migration, notably from Yemen, to fill up the foreign lands to the farthest corner of Islamic civilization, such as al-Andalus. Secondly, the process achieved through the replacement of other administrative language, such as Greek and Syriac with Arabic. Most of social groups under new Islamic power had little resistance to the Arabization, but some other strongly resisted to the assimilatory pressure. Among them were various Christian groups such as Chaldeans, Assyrians, Jacobites, some Jewish communities, Kurds, and the Berbers of North Africa (Hary, 1991, p. 612).

Furthermore, the Persians who maintained separate identity, the process was evidently difficult, even after most of them embraced Islam. The response of the Jews, however, was through of what Bernard Lewis called *Judeo-Islamic* tradition, which is “not the adoption of the Islamic religion but assimilation to Islamic modes of thought and patterns of behavior.” He pointed further that in the (early) Medieval Islamic era, “[t]he process of the acculturation of the Jews in the Arab Islamic world goes beyond the point of Arabization, a term that is perhaps too narrowly linguistic, and might better be designated as Islamization” (Lewis, 1977, p. 78). In this regard, Marshal Hodgson provides more comprehensive insight to this process of “Islamization” through his term of *Islamicate* culture. To this he means it “would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims” (Hodgson, 1974, p. I: 59). More importantly, Islamicate did not only speak about Islam as a religious category, but also a larger cultural frame with its potentiality that allow its subjects to adopt, participate, mobilize and maneuver within for their cultural ends, without necessarily become Muslims. Arabic language and culture were among the visible influence that transformed many cultures where the Muslims set their foot. Thus, Judeo-Arabic is, in this sense, a product of Islamicate Jewry (Stillman, 2000, p. 9), that in the Islamic dominion, Jews adopting Islamic socio-cultural framework and mentality, while at the same time maintained their distinct culture and religious way of life.

The process of Arabization qua



Islamization, interestingly encouraged some elites of Jewish community turned to their Hebraic heritages, not to revive Hebrew as the main language but as a cultural expression and new appraisal to the Bible (Goldstein, 1971, p. 14). This mode of response was partly informed by the advanced Arabic linguistic system that stimulated them to develop Hebrew following the Arabic system. Parallel with it, Jewish intelligentsia such as Sa'adia Gaon, Bahya ibn Paquda, Judah Ha-Levi and Moses Maimonides, all composed their philosophical works in Arabic, thus endowed with internal interaction between Arabic and Hebrew. Besides *falsafah* (philosophy) and *kalām* (theology) as the source of inspiration for them, Arabic provides verbal resources and flexibility to help them engaged with philosophical discourse, something that Hebrew lacked of (Goldstein, 1971, p. 15).

At this point, it is important to look at a glance the outcome of the interaction in more popular area. The following compilation demonstrates the extent of Islamicate registered into Jewish practices and literatures (Lazarus-Yafeh, 2007, p. XI: 540-541). The penetration of Arabic terms and concepts into Judeo-Arabic culture and practices may recall to a degree to Indonesian Christians terms that can be traced to Arabic origin, such as *Allah* (God), *Alkitab* (The Bible), *jemaat* (congregation), etc. During the prayer time, a Jew will aim his body to the direction of Jerusalem. The direction of his prayer was named *al-qiblah*, which is an adoption of Islamic name of direction of prayer to Mecca. To name the least of the hundreds of such examples were terms such as *al-mu'minūn* (the believers), *nawāfil* (optional prayer), *jamā'ah* (congregation, community, which also connoted the *minyān*, the quorum of ten men required for Jewish prayer), and *bid'ah* (heretical religious innovation).

Contrast to the Jews in Christian Lands, where they never used their non-Hebrew names for religious purposes, Judeo-Arabic Jews used their Arabic names in the synagogue, in marriage contracts, and other religious administrations. One of boldest moves that reflect the Islamicate context was the denominations of the Torah by Qur'ānic terms. Torah in many ways referred to as *al-kitāb*, *al-sharī'a*, *al-maṣḥaf*, *al-nūzūl*, *um al-kitāb* and even *al-Qur'ān*. Furthermore, the division of Torah also followed the Qur'ān,

e.g. chapters were called *sūras*, though "verses" retained their Hebrew name, *pasuq*, but interestingly the plural form of *pasuq* again follows Arabic, *pawāsīq*. The oral law (*torah she-be-al-peh*, canonized into written on the *Mishnah* around 200 CE) was called *sunna* or *fiqh*, the cantor (*ḥazzan*) *imām*, *qādī* and *mufī* (judge) and *fatwā* (halakhic response, or religious law legal opinion) were also widely used, Jerusalem became *Dār-al-Salām*, Abraham *Khalīl Allah* (supra, cf. QS. 4:125 and Isaiah 41:8), Moses *Rasūl-Allah* like Muhammad, and the Messiah was called *al-qā'im al-muntaẓar* (the one who shall rise and awaited) like the notion of *Imām al-Mahdī* among the Shi'ites. The fascinating point of this cultural engagement was hybrid term produced by combining Hebrew and Arabic term into a phrase. *Ṣalāt al-shaḥarit* was one example of this hybridity. The "morning prayer" was derived from Islamic specific term *ṣalāh*, "prayer" and Hebrew *shaḥarit*, "morning prayer;" interestingly that the root *shaḥar*, "dawn" seemingly a cognate object with Arabic *saḥūr*, "early morning." Another example was the *laylat al-pesaḥ* (night of the Passover), instead of the Hebrew's *laylat ha-pesaḥ*."

The figure considered as the pioneer of Judeo-Arabic literatures is Sa'adia Gaon (Sa'īd bin Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, 882-942). He was the president of Jewish academy (*gaon*) in Sura (Babylonia), and also Hebrew grammarian, prominent Rabbi, biblical exegete and philosopher. He wrote his philosophic thinking in Arabic and strongly influenced by Islamic *kalām* (lit. "speech" or "discourse"), refers to speculative and rationalistic theology. The early school of Islamic theology was Mu'tazila that was dominant during the reign of Abbasid in the early ninth century. The Mu'tazilites depends on reason as a reliable instrument for acquiring knowledge and directing moral behaviors. Sa'adia Gaon followed the Mu'tazilites argument in his Arabic work, *Kitāb al-'amānāt wal-i'tiqādāt* (Beliefs and Convictions) regarding the foundation of Judaism (in Hebrew, *Sefer ha-Emunot ve-ha-De'ot*, see Manekin, 2007, p. xi). Several other works were also written in Arabic and among them his magnum opus - the legacy prevails until today - was his Bible translation into Arabic that markedly the Arabization of Judaism. Even so, his love to Hebrew as the sacred language and the vehicle of revelation to Jewish people never



died out. On the contrary, he was the first who established the scientific study of Hebrew. Even he was very young when composed a Hebrew dictionary (*Sefer Ha-Egron*). He encouraged the Jews to use Hebrew, “in their coming in and their going out, and in all their occupations, and in the bedroom and to their infants and children”(Cole’s note in IbnGabirol, 2000, p. 203).

Among hundreds of Sa’adia Gaon student there was one with Berber name. Dunash ben Labrat from the city of Fez in Morocco was among the last student of the Gaon. One day he showed to his teacher a new style poem he had written. Sa’adia handed the poem back with a short comment “Nothing like it has ever been seen in Israel”(Ormsby, 2007). Partly disheartened by his teacher dubious compliment, Dunash returned to al-Andalus, the Muslim Spain and he took himself in his new poetry. His novel style in fact was his introducing Arabic meter and grammar to Hebrew poetry. Despite the dismay his mediocre verses prompted in other aspiring Hebrew poets, his style caught on. His mode of poetry soon became common practice in al-Andalus, and then to other areas including among the Jews in the Christian Spain. Hebrew poetry and the language practically stagnant since the late Biblical Period (around second century BCE), but Dunash brought new impetus to them and open the gate to period of “Spanish miracle,” as Goitein put it (Goitein, 1988, p. V: 425), of Jewish literary works eight century onward.

David ben Abraham Al-Fasi (Abu Suleiman Dā’ūd ibn Ibrahim Al-Fāsī, tenth century) published the first Hebrew-Arabic dictionary of the Bible (*Kitāb Jāmi’ al-Alfāz*). Yehudah ben David Ḥayyuj (Abu Zakariyya Yahya ibn Dawūd, ca. 945-ca.1000) and Jonah ibn Janāḥ (Abu-l-Walīd Marwān ibn Janāḥ, ca. 990-ca. 1050), two grammarians developed Hebrew verbal system (*po’al*), based on Arabic grammar, among other by discovered that all Hebrew verbs derived from three-consonant radicals. Under the influence of Arabic philological system, for the first time Hebrew as linguistic system scientifically treated and systematized; the influence that apparent until today if someone studies Biblical and Modern Hebrew, though hardly people relate this to the Judeo-Arabic culture in the past (Goitein, 2005, pp. 136–137). The Jewish grammarians, in fact

were the most benefitted from this interaction. Mastery on three Semitic languages, the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic these grammarians studied the three languages and produced remarkable works (Goitein, 2005, p. 137). The non-Jewish, notably the Islamic literatures rarely quoted the knowledge from Jewish or Hebrew sources. “Religious criticism, social distance, linguistic barriers, and (possibly) indifference to such materials among the Muslims, as in the Christians, limit the extent to which they made use of Jewish texts”(Wasserstein, 1987, pp. 370–371).

Many Jewish geniuses at the time wrote poems in Arabic, and the inscriptions to their Hebrew poems are more often than not in Arabic. Jews often preferred writing Arabic rather than Hebrew, even when dealing with the most sacred matters of Judaism. Only poetry was written in Hebrew almost consistently. The inclination to Hebrew for their poetry, notably what so called Andalusian Hebrew (Fenton, 1990, p. 49) was due to two factors. Firstly, majority of them was liturgical in nature. Though Hebrew was no more a daily lives language it was the language of faith and Judaic studies. Therefore, Hebrew poetry owed significantly by Arabic model but these poets were not tempted to use the language of Islam in order to worship the God of the Jews. Secondly, unlike in the field of philosophy, in poetry Hebrew language was adequate enough as a mean of expressing the Jewish esthetical ideals (Goldstein, 1971, p. 16). Judeo-Arabic, mainly from the second millennium, was written as a rule in Hebrew characters. Despite the basic linguistic similarity of Judeo-Arabic and Arabic, there were important differences between them. Jews wrote Arabic in Hebrew characters, dealt almost exclusively with Jewish topics, and it made use of Hebrew and Aramaic phrases, thus making their literature virtually unintelligible to non-Jews (Blau, 2007, p. II: 298).

In subsequent era, the Judeo-Arabic literatures production declined drastically, except the Judeo-Arabic as group language. Following the decline, Jews of Islam employed almost exclusively Hebrew for their literary works, since the relationship between written Judeo-Arabic with Islamic culture severed (Blau, 1994, p. 228). Jews did not retain long-term loyalty to Judeo-Arabic, unlike to Aramaic and furthermore, did

not have the same ideal of *al-'Arabīyah*, the language of God for the Muslims (Hary, 1991, p. 612). Through this new life of Hebrew literatures, the abundance of Muslim works on sciences, philosophies, medicines, and so on, transferred to Christian Lands. It is through the Arabs that the classical philosophies reentered to the Western world and transmitted via the Hebrew translation of those works, since at the time Europe more readily available the Hebraists rather than the Arabists (Halkin, 1971, p. 151). Jews, through Hebrew language acted as a cultural interface between Christian and Muslims lands.

#### D. Concluding remarks: a comparative insight

It is worth to note in comparative perspective that the enthusiasm of Arabs, “the worshippers of language” (Goitein, 2005, p. 138) on their language has infected other people as far as Southeast Asians. Though not immediately comparable but important to point was that the cultural strategy of Malays in the Southeast Asia by using Arabic script as the vehicle of cultural mobility and basis for literacy development. In the seventeenth century, as the sacred language of Islam, Arabic script adopted presumably because of the Islamic tradition represented the world of intellectual life (Johns, 1975, p. 48). To this we may detect the scope of Islamicate beyond the “proper” Islamic lands. Malay originally was written in Indian characters that were in Pallawa and Nāgarī scripts, but later in Arabic script, along with the growing Islamic influence in the Southeast Asia in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, before later on moved to Rumi, the Latin script (Purbatjaraka in Jones, 2005, p. 281; Kratz, 2002, p. 21). This Arabic script has been adapted and modified for the needs of local languages, and are called *pégon* for the writing of Javanese and Sundanese, Jawi for Malay, and Hurupa for Bugis-Makassar (Pudjiastuti, 2006, p. 384). If through Judeo-Arabic culture the Jews adopted Arabic for their expansion of philosophical and theological capacity, and on the other hand Arabic language modified and expressed in Hebrew script as part of cultural strategy against dominant culture, Arabic scripts for Southeast Asian people seemingly served as cultural mobilization to raise the local languages’ prestige, along with the spreading of Islamic

culture and message.

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