Some remarks on the Middle Arabic of the women’s stories in Nissîm Ibn Shāhīn’s Judeo-Arabic "Al-Faraj ba’da al-Shiddah" (Tunis 990-1062): the nunation in Ibn Shāhīn’s "Faraj"

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1. Introduction

The Kitāb al-faraj ba'da al-Shiddah, “Book of relief after adversity”, by the eleventh-century North African Jewish author Nissīm Ibn Shāhīn is an interesting example of a Judeo-Arabic narrative work. The ‘Relief after adversity’ genre consists of collections of stories in which God grants relief to someone who finds himself in a difficult situation. The author, Rabbi Nissīm ben Yacob ben Nissīm Ibn Shāhīn, had a difficult life. His later years were troubled by unhappy events, which were caused by the destructive invasion of the Banū Hilāl and Banū Sulaym Bedouins in his native region (around Kayrouan in the present-day Tunisia). Ibn Shāhīn’s Faraj text is written in Judeo-Arabic and Middle Arabic, although an intellectual of his stature could have written in Classical Arabic had he wished to do so.¹ It is also interesting to compare Nissīm’s style with Tanūkhī’s (941-994) narrative style in his own

¹ See BRINNER, p. XXVII.
Faraj. After all, there are many cases in which Tanūkhī’s style is nearer to the vernacular than one would expect from a Classical Arabic author.

Recently I made a study of Ibn Shāhīn’s stories about women, and tried to determine the fortune of these women stories in western Europe and the connection with other Jewish story telling. The first printed edition of Nissīm Ibn Shāhīn’s al-Faraj baʿda al-Shiddah, Julian Obermann’s edition of 1933 was printed in the Arabic script. Obermann called the book Taʿlīf ḥasan fī l-Faraj, “A Beautiful Composition about Relief”; the title was a translation of the widespread Hebrew version of the book Hibbur Yafeh me-ha-Yeshu‘ah. The edition also featured a facsimile of the Harkavy manuscript in Hebrew script. In his edition, Obermann frequently ‘corrected’ the Middle Arabic of the text, often relying on the Hebrew translation of the text in his reconstruction of the ‘original’ text. I dealt earlier with some stories in the edition in my contribution to the first AIMA congress. My analysis was most relevant for the particular characteristics of the dual in Middle Arabic. In my second AIMA lecture, I dealt with the Middle Arabic in the poetry of the Egyptian Judaeo-Arabic poet of Andalusi origin, the 12th century Karaite poet Moshe Darī, whose most interesting feature was the different ways in which was dealt with the nunation or tanwīn, which was rendered sometimes with the Hebrew alef, sometimes with the Hebrew nun, and sometimes with Arabic vowels signs.

In this article I shall focus upon how nunation or tanwīn was rendered in some of the women stories. In Ibn Shāhīn’s stories about women we see a great variety of different women. As in adab collections, stories of a similar type are gathered together. The first and the second stories are devoted to chastity of wives. The first story also features a wife’s self-sacrifice for the

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2 Schippers 2007, pp. 277-289; Schippers 2008a, pp. 287-299.
3 Obermann 1933.
4 The MS that Obermann used (hereafter Harkavy) is preserved in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, MS no. 2472, see Adler 1921, p. 59, no. 4026.
5 He was criticized for this by Baneth 1934.
7 Schippers 2012.
sake of her husband. This self-sacrifice is illustrated clearly by the wife’s willingness to be sold as a slave in the market place so that the proceeds can be used as charity for the poor, in order to earn glory for her husband. In the second story, the daughter of Hananyah ben Ṭeradion remains chaste, despite being confined to a brothel or whores’ pavilion.

A third story stresses the contrast between a husband and his wife. This story, which is also known from the later Hebrew work Sefer Sha’ashu‘im, “Book of Delight” (ca. 1170) by Joseph Ibn Zabāra, provides an unfavourable image of women. In this story a king wonders whether a single woman can be found in his city who is completely virtuous (i.e. who is both chaste and wise). His viziers start searching and they find a chaste and wise woman, beautiful as the sun, who is the wife of a wealthy merchant. The king puts her husband to the test by asking him to kill his wife and children and to marry his only daughter. The husband, however, remains faithful to his wife. The merchant’s hesitance to kill his wife and children prompts the king to say: “You are not a man; your heart is that of a woman”. His wife is then put to the test. If she kills her husband, so the king promises, she will be queen tomorrow – but she is given a sword of tin. That night, when she strikes her husband to kill him, the sword proves ineffective. Both husband and wife must then relate their stories in the palace. The king’s wise men hear the stories and are convinced of the king’s wisdom concerning the faithlessness of women.

This story is meant as a contrast with the first two tales, just as in another story the perfidious woman forms a contrast with the surrounding tales.

Two other stories share the theme of women who appear religiously pious at first sight, but who ultimately prove vicious. One is about a seemingly God-fearing woman who is a witch in secret. Another involves a woman who is pious at first sight, but who later proves calculating because of the extra steps she prefers to make by going to another synagogue further away instead of the one in her own neighbourhood.

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8 Brinner 1977, pp. 54-58; Abramson 1965, pp. 455-458; Obermann 1933, pp. 51-54; Harkavy apud Obermann 1933, ff. 45b-49b.
9 Ibn Zabāra, pp. 26-30; Davidson, in his introduction to Ibn Zabāra, pp. L-LII.
Another pair of stories offer the following contrast: story A tells of a woman who chooses her own husband against the will of her father. She also endures self-sacrifice and suffers for her husband. The wife in this story reflects the tone of the introduction, in which men are exhorted to choose learned women, or at least daughters of scholars. Story B, in contrast, concerns a woman who does not choose her own husband, but remains as passive as possible. She is given in marriage to a passive son by his father, while apparently failing to reveal that she had previously been engaged to someone else.

Two other stories A and B are both about women whose lack of intelligence results in restoring the deposited goods that their husbands want to steal to their rightful owners.

There are also stories which reveal women who are much more fierce and linked to Biblical prototypes, one about a woman who beheads the foreign king after introducing herself to him under false pretexts, is reminiscent of such fierce Biblical women as Jael who killed Sisera and Judith who killed Holophernes. The story about a perfidious woman, who is married to someone else, and tries to seduce a famous rabbi, fails and then accuses the rabbi of sexual harassment, is clearly reminiscent of the stories of Potiphar’s wife or Zulaykha.

As a contrast we find in another story the image of a woman who remains chaste. Finally we find a story which tells us of a clever woman who, by telling a story, persuades a king to reinstate her husband in his job and have his rival beheaded.

2. Nunation in three women’s stories

In the following three women stories I want to analyse how nunation or tanwīn is used in the texts and whether we can discover certain rules. In my earlier research on Mosheh Darī’s Judaeo-Arabic poems I saw that the poet was not always consequent: in his poems sometimes there was nunation indicated by the Hebrew letter alef, sometimes by the Hebrew letter ni‘n, sometimes by Arabic vowel signs, and sometimes nunation was supposed to be
there without any indication. Sometimes in the poems you would expect nu-
nation because of the grammatical conditions but this was not possible because
of metrical reasons. Darʾi’s prose in his Arabic introduction was nearly impec-
cable Classical Arabic, but in his poetry he used a kind of Middle Arabic
mixed with Classical Arabic, a kind of maccheronic language. The three case
endings -un, -in, -an, are rendered by means of Hebrew alef or nūn. You have
to deduce from the context whether -un, -in or -an is intended.

How to read the nunations of Ibn Shāhīn’s al-Faraj ba’da al-Shiddah?
Probably sometimes as -un, sometimes -in, sometimes -an, but most frequently
-an. Sometimes nunation is absent, when you would expect nunation.

Joshua Blau deals at length with nunation in his Emergence, from p. 167
on. He points also at a living tradition among Bedouin dialects (p. 167). In his
view the final short vowels at the end of the words dropped first, the
accusative remained the longest (pp. 78 ff.). He mentions lot of examples from
Ibn Shāhīn’s Faraj. I think some cases postulated as -an, written with alef
could be read also with -un, as in the case of Ibn Shāhīn 3.7, wa-lam yadnu
ahadun min-hā (p. 172), or IS 16.10, lam yasīl ilay-hā aḥadun or as IS 91.4 on
-in: ilā aḥadīn (ibidem). Other examples for possible -un instead of -an:
I.S. 26.11 mim-man huwa lāḥīn wa-damun [daman] (p. 181), IS 27.8 wa-kamā
anta tāliḥun. But who am I to come with another suggestion than Joshua Blau?

In the following three women stories we will analyse the most conspi-
cuous cases of nunation and discuss them. First I present the stories with some
relevant Judaeo-Arabic passages, and at the end of each story I will analyse the
nunations of the three stories, with a general final conclusion at the end.

3. The Pious Woman

The story of the Pious Woman11 concerns a woman who appears pious at
first sight, but who ultimately proves to be calculating. The story goes as
follows: “Another time, I saw a widow who went to the synagogue in my
neighbourhood at nightfall to pray. Because I knew that there was a synagogue
in her own neighbourhood, I asked her: “Why did you leave the synagogue in

11 Harkavy, ff. 54a-54b.
your neighbourhood and come here?”. She replied: “My lord, in order to gain recompense and earn reward for the additional steps from that synagogue to this one”, li-an anāla ajran wa-aktasība thawāban fī ziyādati-l-khitā’i-l-latī min tilka-l-kanīsati ilā hādhihi.

3.1. Analysis

The notions of recompense and reward in this story are characteristic of the Jewish religious character of the book. They rarely appear in other narratives. But in Tanūkhī’s al-Faraj ba’da al-Shiddah, in story no. 269, I found the notion of thawāb as ‘reward [in the hereafter]’ when the protagonist is going to assist with carrying a bier with a corpse to a funeral mosque, which passage starts when he sees two persons bearing a bier, and he says by himself: “Maybe a stranger or a poor man, let I help them with carrying the bier so that I will be recompensed [in the hereafter]”.

A few lines further in this Tanūkhī story the protagonist tells to have said to himself: “A recompense [thawāb]!” and then to have carried the bier towards the funeral mosque.

As far as the tanwīn in Ibn Shāhīn’s story is concerned: ajran and thawāban are rendered by Hebrew alef. Thawāban has been rendered tawāban, without th.

4. The girl who chose her husband

A remarkable story12 concerns a girl who chooses to marry her father’s servant. After years of study, this servant becomes the famous Rabbi ‘Aqība. One unusual feature of this story is that the daughter is apparently free to choose her husband, independently from her father. The introduction to the book exhorts men to choose learned women or at least the daughters of scholars.13 The story has a slightly different angle, however, as it is a woman – the daughter of a rabbi –, who encourages to acquire knowledge despite her father’s resistance.

12 Harkavy, ff. 55a-58a.
13 Harkavy, ff. 54b-55a. A similar passage can also be found in Ibn ZAHĀRA 1914, chapter 12, who was perhaps influenced by Nissīm ibn Shāhīn’s present work.
The father in this story, is introduced as follows: “know that our faithful forefathers have transmitted that a man from the rich people of the Eastern region called Ben Kalba Sebu’ah”, I’lam anna qad nagala-l-salaf al-ṣādiq anna rajul-an min mayāsir al-Sha’m yusammā Ben Kalba Sebu’ah. The name is explained as follows: hādhā-l-ism la-hu min faḍli-hi wa-dhālika anna-hu man dakhala ilay-hi jā’i wa-law kalb, kharaja shab’ān min ‘indi-hi, “he got this name from his excellence, namely that whoever entered his home hungry, even a dog, came out from him satisfied”. This man first did not agree with his daughter’s choice: a poor shepherd: he had rabbi ‘Aqībah as a work man who watches his flock, kān la-hu rabbi ‘Aqība ajīran yar’ā ghanama-hu. He swears not to give her any more money, aqsama ‘alā nafsi-hi inna-hu lā ‘yuţ-fi-hā min māli-hi shay[lan], and ‘Aqība lives in poverty with his wife, owning nothing but the straw on which he lies. He even gives away some of the straw to a poor man whose wife will soon give birth, who says to him: ya sayyidī, lī zawjah qad qaruba wilādatu-hā wa-laysa la-hā shay[lan] talid ‘alay-hi fa-la’alla la-kum shay, “my wife will soon give birth but she has nothing to give birth on, perhaps you have something”.

‘Aqība’s wife now tells her husband that he must study the Torah for twelve years. To do so, he stays with the famous rabbis Eleazar and Joshua, and came home with 12 thousand pupils, jā(a) ilā bayti-hi wa-ma’a-hu ithnay ‘ashara alfā tilmād.

He studies for another twelve years, an endeavour that his wife strongly encourages. Through his studies, he achieves the utmost glory. Once, when his wife attempts to pay him a visit, his entourage nearly pushes her away. She says that she had no money to buy a new dress: her husband knows that she has nothing: [57a] huwa ya’lam an laysa lī shay, “he knows that I have nothing”. He intervenes, however, saying that he owes everything to her.

In the meantime, her father, Ben Kalba Sebu’ah, has heard of ‘Aqība’s reputation and wishes to ask his advice about the ban he put on his daughter, who he now knows to live in poverty, Qāla: imdī [57b] wa-stafthi-hi la’alla an ajida lī rukhsah fī-mā andharhu-hu wa-u’tiya bnaṯ shay ta’ishu bi-hi [ ] fa qad ahrqa fa’ādā dā shahāhidu-hā fī-hi min ḍiqi-l-hāl. He does this without realizing that ‘Aqība is her husband.
He approaches [R. ‘Aqība] and tells him of the vow he made. R. ‘Aqība asks him: “For what reason did you do this”, [57b], ʿāyī sabab faʿalīta dhālika?; the father replies: “Because she married someone who could not read and had neither knowledge [of the Torah] nor wealth”, li-anna-hā tazawwajat bi-man layas yaqraʿu wa-lā fi-hi ‘īlm wa-lā dhū māl. R. ‘Aqība then asks: “What if he had done as well as I have done?”. The father replies: “My master, could he read only one chapter, I would give her most of my wealth”, law kāna yā mawlāya yaqraʿu wa-law firq wāḥid la-aʿaytu-hā akthara mālī. At this, R. ‘Aqība says to him: “I am her husband!”. The father then rises, kisses R. ‘Aqība upon the head and gives his daughter half of his wealth. R. ‘Aqība makes a crown of gold for her, as he promised. They are thus delivered from their poverty, their hardships have ended and their well-being has increased.

4.1. Analysis

In the first rajulan (after anna), the syllable -an is rendered by alef, anna rajulan min mayāsīr al-Shaʿm Yusammā Ben Kalba Sebuʿah. In the name explanation, ḥādhā-l-ism la-hu min faḍli-hi wa-dhālika anna-hu man dakhala ilay-hi jāʾi wa-law kalb, kharaja shabʿān min ʿindi-hi, the word jāʾi is written without nunation, although one should expect jāʾi’an as a marker of the ḥāl (circumstance).

However, the word ajīran is written with alif. The syllable -an renders an indefinite accusative expressing the qualification ‘as a work man’ followed by an indefinite relative clause kāna la-hu rabbi ‘Aqība ajīran yarʿā ghanama-hu.

The sentence aqsama ʿalā naḥṣ-hi inna-hu lā yuʿţ-hā min māli-hi shay[an] is remarkable because “he swore that he would not give her any money”, uses the word shay[an], “(no)thing”, this time written with an alef, which could express the hamz sound as well as the nunation, but especially the nunation. The nunation expresses the indefinite accusative. In the next sentence we have one time nunation and the second time not: yā sayyiddi, ʿii zawjah qad garuba wilādatu-hā wa-laysa la-hā shay[an] talīd ʿalay-hi fa-la'allala lakum shay.

In the sentence “She has nothing”, I have rendered the nunation with -un, although you cannot see whether the alif stands for -an or for -un, but grammatically -un is needed. The second shay should have shay[jan] after the ex-
pression la'alla, but in this case it is felt perhaps as giving too much emphasis. Other words such as zawjah have no nunation here, perhaps because of the following relative clause?

In the following sentence jā('a) ilā bayti-hi wa-ma'a-hu iθnay 'ashara alfā tilmīd are striking the numerals with the ‘wrong’ (case) endings, and also the alef in the word alfā, perhaps to stress the accusative after the numerals. The word tilmīd is written without dh, just like thawāb without th in the first story which we dealt with.

The word rukhšah in the sentence “perhaps I will find for me permission” is an accusative. But here is no nunation ending on -tan, but only the female ending -ah without case ending. In the sentence wa-u'ṭiya bnafī shay ta'išhu bi-hi the indefinite word shay is probably in the nominative: in principle the verb has a double accusative, but shay is masculine and corresponds therefore with the verb.

In the last sentences, we find li-anna-hā tazawwajat bi-man laysa yaqra'u wa-lā fi-hi 'ilm wa-lā dhū māl. The words 'ilm and māl without nunation.

In the sentence law kāna yā mawlāya yaqra'u wa-law firq wāhid la'aṭytu-hā akthara mālī, the words firq wāhid are rendered without nunation.

The word shay[]an is rendered in different manners. It is not always clear what rules are to be formulated in this case. Blau remarks (p. 174): “[…] many cases of SHY’, occurring very frequently also in ‘nominative’ and ‘genitive’ in many texts […] may be interpreted as reflecting tanwīn rather than a special orthographic habit”.

5. The woman who did not choose her husband

In contrast to the active role of the woman in the preceding story, the woman in the following story does not choose her own husband, remaining as passive as possible. The story gives her no active role. A butcher, qaṣṣāb, tells a pious man why he figures among the chosen pious men, despite his being a butcher. One day, a caravan passes with several captives, one of whom is a girl who is weeping bitterly, Kuntu fī ba'di-l-ayyāmi wa-anā qā'imun fī

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14 Harkavy, ff. 74a-75b.
A. Schippers

shughlī, ḥattā ʿṢuḥūṣ bī ṭafṣīl qawm mashīyyīn fa-ṭaʿakkhārat min-hum ṣabīyyah wa-ḥiya ṭabkā bukāʾan shādīdan. The butcher asks her: “Why are you weeping while no one else in the caravan weeps?” The girl replies: “My lord, I am a Jewess. Because I have been taken captive, I fear for my religious way of life at the hands of these unbelievers. I wish I would arrive at a place where there are Jews who might redeem me”. Qālat: yā sayyidī anā yahūdiyyah wa-qad subīṭu wa-akhshāʾ alā madhhabī min hāʾulāʾi-l-kuffār wa-kuntu ashtahī law waṣaltu ilā mawdī fī-hi yahūd yafdā-nī. The butcher decides to redeem her, in order that his twenty-year-old son may marry her. The son obeys. The marriage contract is executed and all of the necessary preparations are made.

The butcher invites everyone, poor and rich, to the wedding party. All of the guests eat and rejoice, with the exception of one table, at which the guests have eaten nothing. When asked about this, they reply: “This poor man whom you have placed among us – ever since he sat down he has been weeping bitterly”. The butcher asks why, and the man replies: “My weeping is about the girl whom you have chosen to marry your son. She is from such-and-such city, and I am from there as well. I once had her consecrated to me qad qaddastu-hā lī, such that she was put into my possession mumlakah; ‘betrothed’; she is betrothed to me. She was taken captive, however, as was I some time later. I have the document of her betrothal here in my hand”, Wa-hādhā kitāb taqdisī-hā bi-yadī.

The butcher asks him to describe some characteristic of the girl: La-ka fī ḥādhīhi l-ṣabīyyati ʿalāmah?, and the man affirms that “she has a mole on her toes and its appearance is such-and-such”, Nāʿam, raʿaytu muddah fī bayti abī-hā wa-la-hā shāmah fī baʿḍi aṣāḥī-hā wa-ḥilyatu-hā kadhā wa-kadhā. Thereupon, the butcher asks his son to halt the marriage, saying “This girl is betrothed to another man, namely her husband present here. I have examined her marriage contract, and she is now indeed forbidden for you”, hādhī-h-ṣabīyyah mumlakah li-ghayri-ka wa-huwa-dhā baʿlu-hā ḥādir wa-qad waqaftu ʿalā kutaybatī-hā wa-ḥiya -l-āna ḥarām ʿalay-ka. Thereupon the reunited couple stayed with the butcher for some time, joyful after the distress that had fallen upon them. Upon hearing this story, the scholar says to the butcher:
The Nunation in Ibn Shāhīn’s Faraj

“You have dispelled my sorrow. I do not doubt the greatness of God Most High and my rank in the hereafter, as you are one of my companions”.

A striking feature of this story is that in neither case does the girl oppose the marriages that are planned for her. She is less passive in the beginning of the story, however, when, as a captive, she weeps because she is afraid to fall in the hands of the unbelievers. Her ‘Jewishness’ is the most important thing for her.

5.1. Analysis

In the sentence [72b], Kuntu fi ba’di-l-ayyāmi wa-anā qā’imun fi shughlī, ḥattā [j]āza bī rafaqah wa-fī-hā qawm mashiyīn fa-ta’akkkharat min-hum ṣabiyyah wa-hiya tabkī būkā’ān shadīdan, several nunations are not rendered such as qā’im, rafaqah and ṣabiyyah, but the internal accusative which qualifies the verbal action tabkī has nunation by means of two times an alef būkā’ān shadīdan.

The sentence in which the girl answers, Qālat: ya sayyidī anā yahūdiyyah wa-qad subītu wa-akshī (word spelled with a yā’!) ‘alā madhhabī min hā’ulā’ī- l-kuffār wa-kuntu ashtahī law wasaltu ilā mawdī’ fī-hi yahūd yafḍū-nī, contains several nunations which are not rendered such as yahūdiyyah, mawdī’ and yahūd.

The word mumlakah, “betrothed to someone else”, has no nunation. Probably in the whole of Ibn Shāhīn’s Faraj there are no cases of tanwīn after words ending on -ah (with a supposed tā’ marbūtah). The sentence uttered by the butcher who asks him to describe some characteristic of the girl La-ka fī hādhīhī ‘l-ṣabiyyah ‘alāmāh? has also no nunation in the word ‘alāmāh, and the sentence answered by the man Na’am, ra’aytu muddah fī baytī abi-hā wa-la-hā shāmah fī ba’di asābī‘hā wa-hiya-tu-hā kadhā wa-kadhā has no nunation in the words muddah and shāmah. In the decisive sentence hādhīhī-l-ṣabiyyah mumlakah li-ghayri-ka wa-huwa-dhā ba’la-hā ḥādir wa-qad waqaftu ‘alā kutaibattī-hā wa-hiya -l-aḥā ḥārām ālay-ka the words mumlakah, ḥādir, and ḥarām have no nunation.
6. Final Conclusion

The use of tanwīn in Ibn Shāhīn’s Faraj is generally to be considered as irregular. It is not certain whether the alif which indicates tanwīn, is referring to ‘nominative’, ‘genitive’ or ‘accusative’, except in some cases of adverbial and internal accusatives.

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The Nunation in Ibn Shāhīn’s Faraj


