

FROM AN ARAB QUEEN TO A YIDDISCHE MAMA: THE TRAVELS OF MARITAL ADVICE AROUND THE MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the travels of a literary anecdote about ten pieces of advice a mother gave her daughter on the eve of the latter's marriage. Tracing the various incarnations of the anecdote from its first attestation in ninth-century Arabic works to later versions in Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, Italian, Catalan, and Yiddish demonstrates the connectivity of the medieval Mediterranean and the porous nature of political, religious, and linguistic borders when it comes to popular ethical literary texts. Studying the changes introduced in each new incarnation allows us to study the process of translation and adaptation involved in cultural transmission between different linguistic and religious communities. The travels of the anecdote also highlight the commonalities and differences in normative gender roles in different societies across the medieval Mediterranean.

Umāma bint al-Ḥārith is a figure of some renown in the Modern Arab world. A Google search for her name, in Arabic or English, yields numerous hits. Pious websites quote her, devout sermons extol her, and schools are named after her. Her fame is due to an Arabic literary anecdote set in pre-Islamic Arabia in which she is said to have given ten pieces of advice to her daughter upon her marriage. The daughter was to marry a king of Kinda, a pre-Islamic Arab kingdom, and the progeny of the marriage, two or three generations down, would be none other than Imru' al-Qays, the greatest pre-Islamic Arab poet.

The success of Umāma's advice is not limited to an Arabic or Islamic milieu. Her advice found its way, in various shapes and guises, into medieval Jewish and Christian works in Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, Italian, Catalan, and Yiddish. This study will trace the travels of her marriage advice across geographic, linguistic, and religious borders throughout the medieval Mediterranean. The simple structure of the anecdote (a frame story and a list of advice) and the unusually detailed record of its peregrinations allow us to explore the changes introduced in each incarnation with an exactness rare to the often circumstantial and

speculative literature about Mediterranean literary connectivity. The changes highlight similarities and differences between the cultures in which the works were composed and reveal the processes of translation, adaptation, and composition used by the various translators and adapters. While the first part of the study analyzes each major version of the anecdote in close detail, the second part pans out to consider its travels as a whole. We examine the processes of cultural transmissions and then turn to an analysis of what we consider to be the core gender aspects of Umāma's advice.

Umāma bt. al-Ḥārith's advice has occasionally been mentioned in scholarship. In an important 1986 study, Yehudit Dishon discovered a central element in the story of the anecdote's travels. Exploring the image of the ideal wife in medieval secular Hebrew literature, Dishon noted a parallel between an anecdote in a little-known early thirteenth-century Hebrew composition called *The Sayings of the Arabs* (Heb. *Mishlei he-'arav*) and one in the famous Arabic work of Adab, *The Unique Necklace* (Ar. *al-'Iqd al-farīd*) of Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi (Cordova, d. 940). Dishon conducted a basic comparison of the two versions and noted a later Hebrew version of the anecdote in Isaac Abohab's *The Radiant Lamp* (*Menorat ha-ma'or*).¹ Independently, the anecdote in *The Unique Necklace* was examined or mentioned in several other studies.² However, the discovery of quite a number of new

¹ Yehudit Dishon, "Te'ur ha-'ishah ha-'ide'alit be-sifrut ha-ḥol ha-'ivrit bi-yemei ha-beinayim" (The description of the ideal wife in Hebrew secular literature in the Middle Ages), *Yeda 'Am* 23 (1986), 3–15. Dishon revisited the topic in her book *Good Woman, Bad Woman: Loyal, Wise Women and Unfaithful Treacherous Women in Medieval Hebrew Stories* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2009), 203–205.

² Nadia Maria El Cheikh, "In Search for the Ideal Spouse," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 45 (2002), 186–187; Mohja Kahf, "Braiding the Stories: Women's Eloquence in the Early Islamic Era," in *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*, ed. Gisela Webb (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 153; and Simon Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to*

versions in Arabic and Hebrew, not to mention those in Judeo-Arabic, Yiddish, Italian, and Catalan, calls for a more comprehensive examination of the anecdote and its success.³

The Arabic Versions

While the studies mentioned above take the version in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi’s *The Unique Necklace* as their point of reference, the anecdote is actually found in at least two earlier sources: *The Book of Instructions* (Ar. *Kitāb al-waṣāyā*) of Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (Basra, d. 864–869) and *Kitāb al-Fākhir* of al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama (Kūfa, d. 903), a collection of renowned Arab sayings and figures of speech.⁴ It is in fact the anecdote that opens *The Book of Instructions*, while in *al-Fākhir* it is told as the first occasion in which the phrase *mā warā’aki yā ‘Iṣām* (O ‘Iṣām, what news do you bring?) was uttered.⁵ The authorities cited by both authors can be traced to eighth-century Iraq.⁶

Islam: A Critical Edition, English Translation, and Study of Bryson’s “Management of the Estate” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 352.

³ See Esperanza Alfonso, “Medieval Portrayals of the Ideal Woman,” *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 3 (2011), 141n57, where she comments in relation to this anecdote that the “wide circulation of wisdom contents across genres [...] deserves further scholarly attention.”

⁴ Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, *al-Mu‘ammarūn wa-l-waṣāyā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ‘Āmir (Cairo: Dār ihyā’ al-kutub al-‘arabiya, 1961), 117–120, and C. A. Storey, ed., *The Fākhir of al-Mufaḍḍal Ibn Salama* (Leiden: Brill, 1915), 151–153. See also al-Mufaḍḍal Ibn Salama, *al-Fākhir*, eds. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm al-Ṭahāwī and Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Najjār (Cairo: al-Idāra al-‘amma li-l-thaqāfa, 1960), 184–187.

⁵ See Albert de Biberstein-Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, 2 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1860), 2:1516.

⁶ Ibn Salama cites ‘Awāna b. al-Ḥakam (apparently Kufa, d. 764–70) as his, obviously indirect, source. While al-Sijistānī does not mention his sources, in the later *Kitāb jamharat al-amthāl* of Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (Khūzistān, d. ~1010) we find a composite version of the anecdote reported partially on the authority of Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, whereby the latter’s sources are identified as Abū ‘Ubayda (Baṣra, d. 824/5) and Abū al-Yaqzān, probably ‘Āmir b. Ḥafṣ b. Qādim (d. 786/7 or 806); see n. 16 below. For most of these personalities,

According to these two Iraqi versions, al-Ḥārith b. ‘Amr, the king of Kinda, heard of the beauty, perfection, and intelligence of the daughter of ‘Awf b. Muḥallim. Intrigued, he sent a cunning and eloquent woman from the girl’s tribe named ‘Iṣām to ascertain the matter. Despite the protectiveness of the girl’s mother, Umāma bt. al-Ḥārith, ‘Iṣām was able to see the girl and report back the girl’s beauty to the king.⁷ Al-Ḥārith then approached ‘Awf b. Muḥallim, who agreed to the marriage. Al-Ḥārith sent a marriage gift worthy of kings, and when it was time for the girl to be carried to al-Ḥārith, her mother approached her, saying:

My dear daughter, were the giving of instruction abandoned due to intelligence, moral character and noble deeds, I would have disregarded it and spared you from it. However, instruction is a reminder to the wise and a warning to the negligent.

My dear daughter, were a woman free [from the need to marry] due to her parents’ wealth or to their great need for her, you would have been the first to be free from marriage. However, it is for men that women are created, as it is for them that men are created.

My dear daughter, you are leaving the womb from which you have emerged and the nest in which you grew up for a nest you do not know and a partner to whom you are not accustomed. In possessing you he became a king, so be his handmaid and he will be your slave.⁸ Memorize from me these ten qualities and they shall be for you a goal and a reminder:

The first and the second: Living with him in contentment and obeying him. For contentment gives peace to the heart and obeying brings about the compassion of the lord.

The third and the fourth: Taking care of his eyes and being aware of what he smells.⁹ Let his eyes never glimpse anything unseemly in you, and let him never smell anything except good fragrance from you. Know, my dear daughter, that water is the best perfume and kohl the only needed adornment.

see their entries in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition. For Abū al-Yaqzān, see Bayard Dodge, ed. and trans., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 1:203–204.

⁷ The girl’s beauty is eloquently described in detail from head to toe by ‘Iṣām. It is in ‘Iṣām’s return to king al-Ḥārith that the two expressions that serve as the occasion of the narration of the anecdote in *al-Fākhir* (*mā warā’aki yā ‘Iṣām*) and in *Jamharat al-amthāl* (*ṣaraḥa al-maḥḍ ‘an al-zubda*, “the clear milk has become distinct from the fresh butter”) are spoken.

⁸ See Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 352, who notes the Greek parallels to this expression.

⁹ The underlined sentence is not found in *Kitāb al-waṣāyā* and is taken from *al-Fākhir*.

The fifth and the sixth: Taking care to prepare his meals on time and being quiet while he sleeps. For the intensity of hunger inflames, and the disturbance of sleep arouses anger.

The seventh and the eighth: Preserving his wealth and caring for the members of his household and family. For preserving wealth is good judgment and caring for members of the household and family is good management.

The ninth and the tenth: Do not reveal his secret and do not defy his command. For if you reveal his secret you will not be safe from his betrayal, and if you defy his command you will arouse his anger.

Beware of being happy in his presence when he is sad and from being gloomy around him when he is happy. For the first is disrespectful and the second annoying. The more you glorify him, the more he will honor you, and the more you agree with him the longer he will be your companion.¹⁰ Know that you will not reach all of this until you prefer his desire over your desire and his content over your content regarding that which you love or hate.

May God bless you and favor you, in His mercy.¹¹

The daughter was then taken to al-Ḥārith, where she “took charge of his affairs” (*ghalabat ‘alā amrihi*) and gave birth to the seven kings who ruled after him.

The structure of the anecdote is as follows:

- (1) A framing story describing how the marriage came to be
- (2) The mother’s introductory statements beginning with “My dear daughter” (Ar. *ay bunayya*)
- (3) The list of advice arranged in pairs and usually with a similar structure: a sort of title (e.g., “Preserving his wealth”) followed by direct instruction or explanation (e.g., “For preserving wealth is good judgment”)
- (4) The mother’s concluding statements
- (5) Wrapping up the framing story

It can be seen that the anecdote is shaped like an onion, with the list of advice forming its core wrapped in the (uneven) layers of the framing story and the mother’s introduction and conclusion. The version of the anecdote in al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama’s *al-Fākhir* is essentially the same despite several minor differences in detail, the most noticeable of which is that the advice is not numbered and occasionally loses the sense of being arranged in pairs.

¹⁰ The underlined sentence is not found in *Kitāb al-waṣāyā* and is taken from *al-Fākhir*.

¹¹ Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, *The Book of Instructions*, 119–120.

In *The Unique Necklace* of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, the anecdote appears in two separate occasions. The first follows the same narrative structure as the Iraqi versions, but its framing story has a different emphasis. Here the king is al-Ḥārith’s father, ‘Amr b. Ḥujr. And the focus is not the qualities of the prospective bride but the premarital negotiations between ‘Amr and his future father-in-law, ‘Awf b. Muḥallim al-Shaybānī. The bride is given a name, Umm Ayās, but her mother is unnamed.¹² The advice is given in essentially the same form, although it is significantly shorter. The anecdote concludes by noting that Umm Ayās gave birth to al-Ḥārith b. ‘Amr, the grandfather of the poet, Imru’ al-Qays.¹³ Later in *The Unique*

¹² The discrepancy regarding which of the Kinda kings married Umm Ayās, the daughter of ‘Awf b. Muḥallim al-Shaybānī, is mirrored in other historical sources (which also include a version in which it was al-Ḥārith’s grandfather, Ḥujr Ākil al-Murār, “the eater of bitter herbs”). Pointing to a passage in Theophanes that identifies al-Ḥārith as “the son of the Tha‘labite woman,” Gunnar Olinder prefers the version in which Umm Ayās married ‘Amr over the versions that marry her to Ḥujr or al-Ḥārith. ‘Awf, the bride’s father, after all, was a member of the Tha‘laba branch of the Bakr b. Wā’il. Irfan Shahīd recently offered a radical new reading of the Theophanes passage that dismisses the fact that Arab sources attest to a marriage of ‘Amr to a Tha‘labite woman as “only a strange coincidence.” On different grounds, Christian Julien Robin also rejects the connection between the Theophanes passage and the Kindite al-Ḥārith al-Malik. See Gunnar Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda: The Family of Ākil al-Murār* (Lund: Hakan Ohlsson, 1927), 41–44, 48–49, 51, 69; Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, volume I, Part 1: Political and Military History* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 4–7; Christian Julien Robin, “Les rois de Kinda,” in *Arabia, Greece and Byzantium: Cultural Contacts in Ancient and Medieval Times*, ed. Abdulaziz Al-Helabi, Dimitrios Letsios, Moshalleh Al-Moraekhi, and Abdullah Al-Abduljabbar (Riyadh: King Saud University, 2012), 76–77.

¹³ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, 8 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Tarḥīnī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiya, 1997), 7:89. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi narrates the anecdote on the authority of al-‘Abbās b. Khālid al-Sahmī. There is a reference to him in the entry on his brother, Yaḥyā’ Abū Ḥātim, in Abū al-‘Arab Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Tamīm, *Kitāb ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ ifrīqīya (Classes des Savants de l’Ifriqīya)*, 2 vols., ed. Mohammed Ben Cheneb (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1915–20), 1:120–121 [Arabic] and 2:203–204 [French translation]. According to this entry, Yaḥyā’ studied in Egypt and, despite not having extensive legal knowledge (or perhaps because of it),

Necklace we encounter the story of how ‘Iṣām came to Umm Ayās (here, Umāma is mentioned as the mother) and how ‘Iṣām described the maiden’s beauty (again in a shorter version) to ‘Amr b. Ḥujr.¹⁴

So far we have been able to identify at least seven other medieval Arabic works that contain the anecdote. Without going through the various versions, there are a few observations worth making. The first is the impressive geographic spread that the anecdote enjoyed, including not only al-Andalus and Iraq but also different parts of Iran (Rayy, Isfahan, Khuzistan, and Nishapur) and Egypt.¹⁵ Second, while the version of *The Unique Necklace* is the most well-known today, almost all the later Arabic versions are closer to the two Iraqi versions of Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī and al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama. Third, the differences between the Arabic versions are mostly in the framing story; with respect to the advice of Umāma bt. al-Hārith, they are generally similar in terms of content and order.¹⁶

was given the judgeship of Zāb by Saḥnūn (a central Qayrawānese Mālikī scholar, 777–855) when Yaḥyā’ died from a snakebite.

¹⁴ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, 7:119–120.

¹⁵ These are the locations in which these works were written. Of course, Umāma’s advice reached an even wider geographic spread through the places in which these works were read.

¹⁶ However, the differences are significant enough to allow us to identify with ease whether a given version is similar to the Iraqi versions or *The Unique Necklace* version. *The Unique Necklace*, for example, has only one introductory statement by Umāma compared to the three found in the Iraqi versions. Also, *The Unique Necklace* reverses the order of the fifth and sixth pieces of advice as well as the ninth and tenth. Of all the Arabic versions, the only one derived from *The Unique Necklace* is Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ibshīhī’s (Egypt, d. after 1446) *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*, 2 vols., ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qamīḥa (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiya, 2002), 1:515. Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maydānī (Nisapur, d. 1124), *Majma‘ al-Amthāl*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-tijārīya al-kubrā, 1959), 2:262–264 is derived from al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama’s *al-Fākhir*. As mentioned in n. 6 above, Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī (Khūzistān, d. ~1010) provides in his *Kitāb jamharat al-amthāl*, eds. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Salām and Abū Ḥājir

This relative uniformity provides a clear baseline as we move on to compare the Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic versions with the original Arabic and examine whether the Christian versions are derived from the Hebrew or directly from the Arabic.

Beyond these versions of our anecdote, it must be noted that there are numerous other Arabic anecdotes of premarital parental advice that contain similar advice and occasionally the same wording as our anecdote but without the structure or framework of ‘Umāma’s advice. An especially close example appears in the Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 998) *The Nourishment of the Hearts*:

Asmā’ b. Khārija al-Fazārī, one of the Arab sages, instructed his daughter on the night of her nuptial procession saying: “my dear daughter, were she alive your mother would have been more deserving to instruct you than me, but now I am more deserving than anyone else. Hear from me what I am saying: you are coming out of the nest in which you grew up and proceeding to a bed you do not know, and a partner to whom you are not accustomed. Be his earth, and he will be your sky. Be his place of rest [*mihād^{an}*; also “bed”] and he will be your pillar [*‘imād^{an}*]. Be his handmaid and he will be your slave. Do not pester him for he will detest you, and do not withdraw from him, for he will forget you. If he draws near you approach him, and if he stays away from you keep your distance. Guard his nose, ear and eye, let him not smell anything from you but good smell, not hear anything but what is

Muḥammad Sa‘īd b. Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiya, 1988), 1:468–472, a composite version derived from two sources: Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī’s *Book of Instructions* and Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghawī (Baghdad d. 929/30), who received it from a certain al-‘Uqādī, perhaps Abū Sahl Bishr b. Mu‘ādh (Baṣra, d. 859/60). In *Nathr al-durr fī al-muḥāḍarāt* of Manṣūr b. Ḥusayn al-Ābī (Rayy, d. 1030), we find elements from both *The Book of Instructions* and *al-Fākhir*, 7 vols., ed. Khālid ‘Abd al-Ghanī Maḥfūz (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiya, 2004), 6:251. Since this work omits the framing story and puts the fifth and sixth pieces of advice after the seventh and eighth, it is easy to tell that *Nathr al-durr* is the source for the three versions found in al-Rāghīb al-Iṣfahānī’s (Iṣfahān, d. 1108/9) *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā’ wa-muḥāwarāt al-shu‘arā’ wa-l-bulaghā’*, 5 vols., ed. Riyāḍ Ibn Hamīd Murād (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 2006), 3:415–416; Ibn Ḥamdūn (Baghdad, 1166), *al-Tadhkira al-ḥamdūniya*, 10 vols., eds. Iḥsān ‘Abbās; Bakr ‘Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-ṣādir, 1996), 3:343–344; and Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (Baghdad, d. 1258), *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, 20 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār ihyā’ al-kutub al-‘arabiya, 1963), 18:332–333.

virtuous, nor see anything but beauty. As I told your mother on the night of consummation:¹⁷

Take what is freely given [Quran 7:199], thus you will make my love last

And do not speak at the outburst of my anger.

Do not strike me once [even] as you tap the tambourine

For you do not know how the grass widow fares.

Do not make numerous complaints, for they take away desire.

And my heart will disdain you, for hearts change.¹⁸

I have seen that when love and hurt come together in the heart

Love does not linger, it goes away.¹⁹

Asmā' b. Khārija (d. 684/5) was a prominent “successor” (*tābi 'ī*) in Kūfa who married his daughter, Hind, to none other than al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, the fearsome Umayyad governor of Iraq. The story was again narrated in the celebrated *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who seems to have transformed Asmā' to be the bride's mother, perhaps on the model of Umāma's advice.²⁰ In *Kitāb al-aghānī* of Abū al-Faraj al-

¹⁷ Reading *binā 'ī bihā*.

¹⁸ We complete this line from al-Ghazālī; see n. 20 below.

¹⁹ Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalat al-maḥbūb*, 2 vols., ed. 'Āṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiya, 2009), 2:421. We benefited from the German translation in Richard Gramlich, *Die Nahrung der Herzen: Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī Qūt al-qulūb, eingeleitet, übersetzt und kommentiert*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992–95), 3:588–589, and the English translation in Beatrix Immenkamp, “Marriage and Celibacy in Medieval Islam: A Study of Ghazali's *Kitāb ādāb al-nikāḥ*” (PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 1994), 172.

²⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1991), 2:66. As is well-known, al-Ghazālī used *The Nourishment of the Hearts* extensively in his masterpiece; see Saeko Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abū Ṭālib al-Makki* (London: Routledge, 2013), 99–100, and the studies mentioned there in n. 30. We should also note another interesting parallel found in the second part of the Persian *Counsel for Kings* (*Naṣīhat al-mulūk*) wrongly attributed to al-Ghazālī: “A wife will become dear to her husband and gain his affection, firstly by honoring him; secondly by obeying him when they are alone together; and (further) by bearing in mind his advantage and disadvantage, adorning herself (for him), keeping herself concealed from (other) men and secluding herself in the house; by coming to him tidy and pleasantly perfumed, having meals ready (for him) at the (proper) times and cheerfully preparing whatever he desires, by not making impossible demands, not

Iṣfahānī (d. 967) and in several other later works, we find a version of Asmā' b. Khārija's advice that is markedly more distant from Umāma's advice.²¹ Some websites include the full Umāma anecdote but attribute it to Asmā', perhaps to remove it from its pre-Islamic settings and provide it with an Islamic pedigree.²² This complex interplay attests to the fluidity and malleability of literary material between similar anecdotes.

The Hebrew Versions, *The Sayings of the Arabs*

While the anecdote is first attested in Abbasid literary circles, a Hebrew adaptation in a work called *The Sayings of the Arabs* (Heb. *Mishlei he-'arav*) proved pivotal in spreading the anecdote to new audiences.²³ Written at the end of the twelfth century or just after in the

nagging, keeping her nakedness covered at bed-time, and keeping her husband's secrets during his absence and in his presence." See F. R. C. Bagley, trans. *Ghazālī's Book of Counsel for Kings (Naṣīḥāt al-mulūk)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 170. A medieval Arabic translation of this work has some slight variations; see Pseudo al-Ghazālī, *al-Tibr al-masbūk fī naṣīḥāt al-mulūk*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiya, 1988), 129. On the false attribution of the second part of *Naṣīḥāt al-mulūk* to al-Ghazālī, see Patricia Crone, "Did al-Ghazālī Write a Mirror for Princes? On the Authorship of *Naṣīḥāt al-mulūk*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987), 167–191 [reprinted in Patricia Crone, *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī: Religion, Law and Political Thought in the Near East, c. 600–1100* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), XII.

²¹ Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, 25 vols., ed. 'Abd al-Sattār Aḥmad Farrāḥ (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1957–1964), 20:333. See also al-Bayhaqī, *al-Jāmi' li-shu'ab al-īmān*, 14 vols., ed. Mukhtār Aḥmad Nadwī (Riyad: Maktabat al-rushd, 2003), 11:174–175; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Bahjat al-majālis wa-uns al-mujālis*, ed. Muḥammad Mursī Khawlī, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Dār al-miṣrīya li-l-ta'lif wa-l-tarjama, 1967–1970), 2:56; and Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat dimashq*, 80 vols., ed. 'Umar Gharāma al-'Amrawī (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1995–2000), 9:57–58.

²² For example, <http://www.djelfa.info/vb/showthread.php?t=1710705> and <http://www.muslmah.net/t141266/>. Both last accessed August 28, 2015.

²³ For a critical edition, a translation into Spanish, and the most recent analysis of this work, see David Torollo, "El *Mišle he-'arab* [Los dichos de los árabes] y la tradición sapiencial hebrea (Península Ibérica y

Iberian Peninsula or Provence, *Mishlei he-‘arav* is a work that fused the Arabic tradition of Adab with the Jewish ethical and wisdom tradition.²⁴ The work is preserved in some ten extant manuscripts dating from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, five of which are complete. The work was published from a single manuscript by Yehiel Brill (Ben Rabbi Yehuda Leib) in fascicles, chapter by chapter, in various nonconsecutive numbers of the Hebrew journal *ha-Levanon*, when it was being issued in Paris between 1865 and 1869. Since this publication has for many years been inaccessible, *Mishlei he-‘arav* has been described by Ezra Fleischer as one of the most neglected works in the study of Hebrew literature of Spain.²⁵

The author of *The Sayings of the Arabs* does not mention his name or provide biographical information; however, a few acrostics that appear in some of its poems spell out the Hebrew name Yiṣḥaq and the Arabic name Iṣḥaq (إسحاق). The author claims that when he was young he read Arabic books and found among them one that contained valuable morals, a fact that amazed and saddened him at the same time, because he could not understand how it was possible for Arabs to have this kind of wisdom literature. Then his heart said to him

Provenza, s. XII y XIII)” (PhD dissertation, University of Salamanca, 2014). *Mishlei he-‘arav* is often called *Mishlei ‘arav* in scholarly literature; however, the name of the work in all manuscripts that preserve a title is *Mishlei he-‘arav*. In medieval works, this work was often called *Sefer ha-musar*; see more in Torollo, “El Mišle he-‘arab,” 121n308, and notes 49 and 61 below.

²⁴ The *terminus ante quem* for the work used to be derived from citations of it in Menaḥem ha-Me’iri’s (d. 1315) works. However, as shall be seen below, the fact that Jacob Anatoli (d. 1256) used material from the work sets the new *terminus ante quem* in the middle of the thirteenth century.

²⁵ See Ezra Fleischer and Hayyim Schirmann, *Toldot ha-shirah ha-‘ivrit bi-Sfarad ha-nošrit u-vi-drom Šarfat* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1997), 216–221. Today *ha-Levanon* is available on the website of the National Library of Israel in collaboration with Tel Aviv University: http://jpress.org.il/Olive/APA/NLI_heb/?action=tab&tab=browse&pub=hlb. Last accessed February 9, 2015.

that if he read the book carefully, he would find that all the moral content in the Arabic work is actually stolen from the Bible, which gladdened him. Frustrated by the fact that the Arabs were so proud of a literature that was not truly theirs, he decided to translate the work into Hebrew in order to reveal the theft and show that wisdom was given to God's chosen people alone.²⁶

The main goal of *The Sayings of the Arabs* is to offer advice about moral conduct. The work is divided into fifty chapters of prose, with poems interspersed, which discuss either encouraged virtues, such as moderation, prudence, trustworthiness, wisdom, humility, forgiveness, friendship, generosity, patience, hospitality, and gratefulness; or censured vices, such as vanity, pride, envy, foolishness, wrath, sarcasm, and avarice. Among such topics as the vanity of earthly life or the relationships within the family, the author includes three chapters that deal directly with women.

Chapter 45 advises men to look for wives known for their good actions and not for beauty or wealth, because these two external features are ephemeral while moral virtue is everlasting. Chapter 46 warns the reader about the danger inherent in women: their mental instability, malice, and wish to control everything. Our anecdote is found in Chapter 47, titled "Do not denigrate virtuous women, for there are some females better than men." The chapter contains four anecdotes and two poems about virtuous women. The first anecdote involves a king who asks a wise man about the attributes of the perfect woman, and the wise man describes her as a submissive and obedient woman who "abandons the qualities of her father

²⁶ For this motif in Andalusī Hebrew literature, see, for example, Ross Brann, *The Compunctious Poet: Cultural Ambiguity and Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 38; and Esperanza Alfonso, *Islamic Culture through Jewish Eyes: Al-Andalus from the Tenth to Twelfth Century* (London: Routledge, 2008), 49.

and learns the qualities of her husband.”²⁷ The third anecdote is about a father who asks his son what he likes and dislikes of women. The fourth tells the story of a king trying to find women who were prophetesses, queens, and sages. He asks his wise men to explain the verse “as for what I sought further but did not find, I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all” (Eccl. 7:28), giving them the example of Deborah as judge, leader, and prophetess of the people of Israel.

Ours is the second anecdote in Chapter 47:

“A son of a great king married the daughter of another king. She approached her mother as she was being given to the officials and servants who came to take her [to her husband], and started to cry at the thought of leaving her father’s house. Her mother told her: “restrain yourself, my daughter, lest the one who wants to be happy with you shall be upset. Know that were it possible for a respectable girl [not to marry] due to the honor of her family and to bask in the pleasure of her mother, I

²⁷ The complete description is as follows: “She who abandons the qualities of her father and learns the qualities of her husband to the point that those who see her say that she is the daughter of her husband, she who shows a kind face to her husband when he makes her angry, she who respects him in awe both in moments of misery and wealth and both in his days of youth and old age, she whose feet are heavy to go out of the house and whose hands are nimble to give a crust of bread to the poor, she who throws herself into her work, she who works at home among her servants, she who breastfeeds her children and does not give them to a wet nurse, she who listens to the one who is talking and does not hurry to answer back, she who avoids the presence of troublesome women who seek quarrels, she who says ‘I am satiated’ even without being full, she who is happy with guests, and if her husband brings them home, she serves them as one of the servants.” See chapter (ch.) 47, lines (lin.) 2–10, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-‘arab*,” 325. This whole passage was later picked up by Menaḥem ha-Me’iri (Provence, d. 1315) in his commentary on Proverbs, *Perush ha-Me’iri le-sefer mishlei* (Jerusalem: Ošar ha-posqim, 1969), 291–292; see Avraham Grossman, *He Shall Rule Over You* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar, 2011), 374; and Alfonso, “Medieval Portrayals,” 140–141. On the way ha-Me’iri used material from Anatoli; see James T. Robinson, “Secondary Forms of Transmission: Teaching and Preaching Philosophy in Thirteenth-Century Provence,” in *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean World*, eds. Haggai Ben-Shammai, Shaul Shaked, and Sarah Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2013), 194, 201, 206, 214.

would have kept you by my side to be happy and merry in plenitude until death. However, women were not created but for men, and husbands are not upright without their wives. I hereby send you from my bosom to a stranger I do not know. Become his handmaiden and he will be your servant in love and joy. I hereby command you with ten matters, the glory of the honorable lady, place them in your heart and your husband shall cling to you and love you.

First: His anger. Avoid anything that angers him and do not be happy when he is furious. Do not put a long face before him both in moments of arousal and serenity; and with a sweet answer and please ease his outburst.

Second: His foods and drinks. Know the food and the dishes he likes, make those to him and tell him you like only them. Do not be late when it is the hour of his meal, for hunger does not beget kindness. Do not remind him when the wine is out of his head anything that he might have said when intoxicated. Drink if he commands you, as instructed, but do not get drunk lest he finds something indecorous about you.²⁸

Third: His sleep. Watch over all that calms his sleep and avoid anything that may awake him, since disturbing the sleep strengthens the rage and the anger.

Fourth: His wealth. Be thrifty with his wealth and do not give anything he possesses without his approval, as men are praised for liberality, so it is proper for women to exert themselves in accumulating and girding themselves.

Fifth: His secret. Do not reveal his secrets and do not disclose to others his riddles, since the man boasts at home and says what he wants, but he gets angry when his defamation is exposed.

Sixth: Loving the ones he loves. Do not despise the ones he loves from his male and female servants, since the one he rejected because of you will not rest until he finds fault with your actions.

Seventh: His command. Do not disobey his command and do not say, while he is speaking, that your idea is better than his, even if he is in the wrong.

Eighth: Your request. Do not ask him for anything that will be difficult for him to provide, since if he gives it to you, he will feel resentment towards you because your request was difficult.

Ninth: Appearing attractive. Prepare yourself, as all do, in order to appear attractive to him, and know that water gives off a better aroma to the body and clothes than any perfume or nards.

Tenth: His jealousy. Be aware and guard yourself from talk of jealousy, since jealousy produces hatred and brings about repudiation.

You, my daughter, are my deposit in the hands of one who will not lose it. Go in peace.”

נשא בן מלך גדול בת מלך אחר. ותבא אל אמה והיא מוצאת אל השרים והעבדים הבאים לישא אותה ותשא את קולה ותבך להפרדה מבית אביה. ותאמר לה אמה: התאפקי בתי פן יתעצב המתאוה לשמוח בך, ודעי כי לו נמנעה בת כבודה ליקר משפחתה ולהתענג בנעימות יולדתה מגבר, השארתוך נגדי בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרב כל עד הקבר, אבל לא נבראו הנקבות כי אם לאנשים ולא יישר בנין האישים כי אם בנשים. והנני מוציאך מחיקי אשר קבעתי אל נכרי אשר לא ידעתיו. שבי שפחתו, יהי עבדך באהבתו ובשמחתו. והנני מצוה אותך דברים עשרה: הם תפארת הגברת היקרה, שכני אותם בלבך, ידבק בך בעלך ויאהבך.

הראשון: כעסו. השמרי מכל אשר יכעיסהו, ואל תשמחי עת קצפו, ואל יהיו לך לפניו פנים זועפים עת התעלסו והנחתו ובמענה רך ובדבר תחנונים תשככי חמתו.

²⁸ Deuteronomy 23:15 and 24:1.

השני: מאכליו ומשקיו. דעי המטעמים והמאכלים אשר יאהב ואתם עשי לו, ואמרי כי לא תאבה בלתם. ואל תאחרי הכין אכלו בעתו כי הרעב אין טוב לב אתו, ואל תזכרי לו בצאת היין מראשו מאומה מדברו אם היין עברו, ושתי אם יצוך כדת ואל תשכרי פן יראה בכך ערות דבר.
השלישי: נומו. שמרי כל אשר ישקיט שנתו והשמרי מכל אשר יקיצהו כי הבהיל הנומה מחזק האף והחמה.²⁹

הרביעי: הונו. היי קובצת יד על הונו ואל תתני מאומה מכל אשר לו כי אם ברצונו, כי כאשר יהולל הגבר המפזר כן לא יאות לאשה כי אם התאמץ לכנוס והתאזר.

החמישי: סודו. אל תחשפי סודותיו ואל תחודי עם אחרות דברי חידותיו, כי האיש יתפאר בביתו וידבר בתאותו ויקצף בחשף דבתו.

הששי: אהבת אהוביו. אל תשנאי אשר יאהב מכל עבדיו ואמהותיו, כי לא ישקוט אשר ירחיק בגללך עד שימצא תביעה במעללך.

השביעי: מצותו. אל תמרי מצותו ואל תאמרי בדברו ואם אינו מוטב כי עצתך טובה מעצתו.

השמיני: שאלתך ממנו. אל תשאלי ממנו אשר יכבד עליו כי אם ישאילך יטור בלבו כי תקשי במשאלך.

התשיעי: חנו. התכונני כדרך כל הארץ למצא חן בעיניו ודעי כי המים לגוף ולבגדים מטיב הריה על כל בשמים ונרדים.

העשירי: קנאתו. השמרי ושמרי נפשך מדברי הקנאה כי הקנאה תחדש השנאה ואל כריתות הגרוש מביאה.

והנך בתי פקדוני ביד אשר לא יתעה עמו הפקדון ולכי לשלום.³⁰

The Hebrew version closely follows the structure of the Arabic original, with its framing story and mother's introductory statements and list of advice, each with a title, an instruction, and, usually, an explanation. However, the advice is presented one by one and not arranged in pairs. There are some changes in the order of presentation and some additions, such as the eighth piece about the requests of the wife and the tenth one on jealousy.³¹ As can be easily seen above, the explanatory sections in *The Saying of the Arabs*

²⁹ This third piece of advice does not appear in *ha-Levanon's* edition. The second piece has been split in two, and the section dealing with wine forms the third piece there.

³⁰ See ch. 47, lin. 23–54, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-‘arab*,” 326–328. For the text here, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 5463 has been completed with some variants of Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 507,1.

³¹ This piece of advice does not appear in any of the known Arabic versions, but similar advice (“My dear daughter, beware of jealousy for it is the key to divorce”) is well known from other Arabic texts, such as the anecdote quoted above by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, and earlier in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashraf*, ed. Wilferd Madelung (Beirut: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003), 57, and Ibn Qutayba, *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*, 4 vols., ed. Mufid Muḥammad Qamīḥa (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, 1986), 4:76. Therefore, some of the creativity of the author of *Mishlei he-‘arav* is in selecting material from various Arabic works.

are significantly longer than in the Arabic versions. Several details suggest that the author had before him an Arabic version closer to one of the Iraqi versions discussed above rather than the Andalusian *The Unique Necklace*.³² Finally, the mother's concluding statement is quite short in comparison with that of Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī's.

A more detailed comparison between the Arabic versions of the anecdote and the Hebrew one allows us to examine the process of translation and adaptation by which the anecdote was introduced into a new religious, cultural, and linguistic context. Expanding the explanations accompanying each piece of advice gave the adapter the occasion to demonstrate his creativity. Eli Yassif, a scholar of medieval Hebrew literature, identifies three different levels in which the Judaization of non-Jewish materials can be distinguished in such works. First, there is the rhetorical-technical level, wherein the beginning or ending of the stories is changed—for example, by adding a biblical verse or linking foreign elements with familiar biblical characters or episodes from Jewish history. Second, there is the structural level, in which the literary plot is modified by including cultural elements that Jews consider Jewish. Finally, there is a functional-societal level, in which changes that reflect the situation and inner world of Jews and their worries, wishes, and cultural values are introduced.³³

In terms of the rhetorical-technical level, the Hebrew version retains the general Arabian origin of the anecdote, by being included in *The Sayings of the Arabs*, as well as the

³² The Hebrew version has one of the introductory statements that is in the Iraqi version but not in *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*. Furthermore, the order of advice in the Hebrew (food, sleep, money, secret, household, command) agrees more closely with the order in the Iraqi versions (food, sleep, money, household, secret, command) than that of the *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* version (sleep, food, money, household, command, secret).

³³ For a broader study with examples of these three levels, see Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Game, Meaning* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 273–282.

royal status of the characters and the prospective marriage as the occasion for the anecdote. At the same time, the Hebrew version omits specific details (names of personalities, tribal affiliations, Arabic turns of speech), which makes the narrative seem anonymous and more generic.

On a structural level, while the core of the anecdote is a list of advice and has no plot to speak of, the adapter introduced a significant element in the second piece of advice: wine. The mother advises her daughter not to remind the husband of anything he may have said when intoxicated and to drink wine if instructed, but not to get drunk, “lest he finds something indecorous (*‘erwat davar*) about you.”³⁴ The advice to exercise restraint in the drinking of wine transports the anecdote into a non-Islamic context. This change is given a specific Jewish color by the use of *‘erwat davar*, a biblical expression (Deut. 23:15 and 24:1) that serves as the crux of Talmudic discussions of divorce.³⁵ By adding this loaded phrase, the adapter not only hung a threat of divorce over the mother’s advice but also gave the anecdote a specifically Jewish resonance.³⁶

³⁴ See ch. 47, lin. 36, in Torollo, “*El Mišle he-‘arab*,” 326.

³⁵ Mishnah, *Gittin*, 9:10 and Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin*, 90a-90b analyze this second occurrence to elaborate the laws of divorce. For an accessible introduction, see Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women’s Issues in Halakhic Sources* (New York: Schocken, 1984), 70–78.

³⁶ Eli Yassif claims that “for a [foreign] tale to be absorbed by medieval Jewish culture, the pagan and mythological elements must either vanish or Jewish elements must be introduced as a counterweight”; see Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale*, 271. Yehudit Dishon also says that “building, for example, on an existing story in Eastern literature, the Hebrew author would first provide a Jewish background and give the heroes Hebrew names. Often the story started and ended with a verse from the Bible, adding authenticity to its content. Interspersed into the story were more verses and citations from biblical and rabbinic sources, while the language of the story itself was biblical Hebrew. The reader of a story that had been changed in these ways would be easily convinced that it was rooted in centuries-old Jewish tradition”; see Yehudit Dishon, “Images of Women

This Judaizing process is furthered by the use of Hebrew expressions with notable biblical reverberations, which may have helped the anecdote gain a hearing with new audiences by appearing culturally familiar. For example, at the end of the introductory statement, the mother says to the daughter that if she adheres to the advice, then “your husband shall cling to you” (*yidbaq bakh ba'lekh*), a statement that harks back to “hence a man [...] clings to his wife (*ve-davaq be-'ishto*), so that they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).³⁷ Another example may be found in the fifth piece of advice, which deals with the husband’s secret and hints at Judges 14, where Samson reveals the solution to his riddle to his foreign wife, who tells the secret to her people. Other examples are “drink if he commands you, as instructed” (*u-shti 'im yešawwekh ka-dat*) when talking about drinking wine in the second piece of advice, which may allude to “and the rule for the drinking was ‘no restrictions’” (*ve-ha-shetiyyah ka-dat*, Esth. 1:8), and the mother’s statement “I hereby command you with ten matters,” which may be an allusion to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17 and Deut. 5:4–21).³⁸

in Medieval Hebrew Literature,” in *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 39.

³⁷ See ch. 47, lin. 30, in Torollo, “*El Mišle he- 'arab*,” 326.

³⁸ See ch. 47, lin. 35–36 and 29–30, respectively, in Torollo, “*El Mišle he- 'arab*,” 326. Andalusí Jewish authors from the so called “Golden Age of Jewish culture in Spain” were immersed in a context of literary rivalry with Arabic. These authors accepted and adapted for Hebrew works the Arabic concepts of *fašāḥa* (purity) and *balāgha* (eloquence) that centuries before were given to the Quran. A consequence of this adoption is the authors’ desire to write their poetic works in the purest Hebrew modeled on the Bible. On the contrary, when Jewish authors wrote Hebrew prose or translated prose works from Arabic in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the literary requirement of imitating the biblical Hebrew loosened. In both cases, but for different reasons, the authors made use of the *shibbuš* style—i.e., the insertion of, and allusion to, biblical verses, which inevitably Judaizes the text. On the literary rivalry and the relationship of Jewish authors to the Hebrew

A more sophisticated transformation can be detected in the way the statement of gender equality in the Arabic, “women are created for men, as are men created for women,” was in Hebrew turned into “women were not created but for men, and husbands are not upright without their wives.”³⁹ The gender equality in the Arabic version agrees with the gender equality of creation in Quran 4:1 and 7:189: “It is he who created you out of one living soul and made of him his spouse.”⁴⁰ However, the Jewish adapter could not tell his audience that women are created for men as men are created for women, because this is simply not how the biblical creation story has it. So, he changed it slightly to “women were not created but for men, and husbands are not upright without their wives.” This agrees with the biblical creation story that sees the creation of Eve as a “fitting helper” for Adam because “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). This statement also echoes the rabbis who claimed that “a man without a wife is without joy, without blessing, and without goodness” and saw wives as walls surrounding their husbands and protecting them from releasing their sexual desires in unpermitted ways.⁴¹ This change did more than break the gender equality of the Arabic version; now, both parts of the sentence imply that women exist for the benefit and development of men.

Later Hebrew versions

language, see Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 219–263; Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 126–232; and A. S. Halkin, “The Medieval Jewish Attitude toward Hebrew,” in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 233–248.

³⁹ See ch. 47, lin. 27–28, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-‘arab*,” 326.

⁴⁰ See A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 194.

⁴¹ Babylonian Talmud, *Yevamot*, 62b.

Although *The Sayings of the Arabs* has remained neglected until very recently, through it the anecdote enjoyed a substantial success in later works. The first Hebrew author of which we know who used our anecdote is Jacob Anatoli (d. 1256), a Provençal translator and scholar.⁴² As the son-in-law of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the Hebrew translator of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Anatoli was heavily influenced by Maimonidean philosophy, which dominated the sermons he began delivering in Provence around the 1220s. Later, he was invited by Frederik II to Naples, where he collaborated with Christian scholars, notably Michael Scot, in translating Arabic works into Latin. In Naples, he completed one of the first known anthologies of medieval Jewish sermons, entitled *The Goad of the Scholars* (Heb. *Mamad ha-talmidim*).⁴³ This anthology follows the order of the weekly Torah portions (pl. *parashot*, sing. *parashah*), offering allegorical-philosophical interpretations of the text.

The anecdote as we know it, with the advice arranged by number and within a clear structural framework, does not appear in *Mamad ha-talmidim*. However, the content from the anecdote is found in a sermon for *parashat Hayyei Sarah* (the life of Sarah, Gen. 23:1–25:18) that has at its center the search of Abraham’s servant for a wife for Isaac.⁴⁴ As is his custom, Anatoli expounds the *parashah* through another biblical text from *Ketuvim*, in this case Psalm 45, especially vv. 11–12, which he places at the beginning of his sermon: “listen,

⁴² On Jacob Anatoli, see Israel Bettan, *Studies in Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939), 49–88; Joseph Dan, *Hebrew Ethical and Homiletical Literature* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), 82–91; and Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching, 1200–1800: An Anthology* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 15–16, 111–113. We would like to thank Noga Rubin for bringing the influence of the anecdote on *Mamad ha-talmidim* to our attention.

⁴³ Saperstein estimates the 1220s as the years in which Anatoli preached in Provence and 1236–1240 as the years for the completion of *Mamad ha-talmidim*; see Marc Saperstein, *Your Voice Is Like a Ram’s Horn: Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1996), 57n3.

⁴⁴ Jacob b. Shim’on b. Anatoli, *Mamad ha-talmidim* (Lyck: Mekize Nirdamim, 1866), 19a-23b.

daughter, and note, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father's house, and let the king be aroused by your beauty; since he is your lord, bow to him."⁴⁵ Anatoli shows his cards very early by declaring that, exoterically, Psalm 45 is about glorifying the king and instructing the queen about her proper behavior while, esoterically, the psalm is praising the intellect's contemplation of the divine and exhorting the soul to assist the intellect.⁴⁶

In this sermon, Anatoli presents Rebecca, as well as the woman from the psalm, as the model of the virtuous wife (*eshet hayil*).⁴⁷ Midway into the sermon, Anatoli turns to the instruction regarding the queen's proper behavior. After explaining "listen daughter," he turns to unpacking the word "and note" (*u-re'i*)

In the word "and note" he included many matters: his happiness, anger, love, hate, sleep, i.e. take care of him and note that when he is happy to be happy yourself and not to have a long face. Similarly, do not have a merry face when he is angry and do not hate whom he loves, or love whom he hates from his neighbors and servants.⁴⁸

Anatoli goes on to mention guarding the husband's secrets, not making burdensome demands, taking care of his food, and modest beautification. On a few occasions, the sermon uses the text from *The Saying of the Arabs* directly, ruling out the possibility that Anatoli might have used an Arabic version of the anecdote. While Anatoli does not cite his source,

⁴⁵ On Anatoli's methodology in his sermons, see Dan, *Hebrew Ethical*, 83, and Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 112.

⁴⁶ That Anatoli presents very clearly in the beginning of the sermon his exoteric and esoteric interpretation seems to reflect the fact that he composed it for his daughter's wedding (see below).

⁴⁷ In the biblical context, *eshet hayil* probably meant something closer to "woman of strength." However, as attested by Maimonides and Anatoli, in medieval contexts it was often rendered "the good wife" in opposition to evil women. We would like to thank Carol Meyers for briefly discussing this point with us.

⁴⁸ Anatoli, *Malmed ha-talmidim*, 21a.

he hints at it when claiming that “these two verses [i.e., Psalm 45:11–12] contain all the good qualities of virtuous women mentioned in the books of ethics (*sifrei ha-musar*).”⁴⁹

According to Anatoli’s allegorical-philosophical interpretation, the king in the psalm is revealed to be the intellect, while the bride is the soul.⁵⁰ In this Anatoli was following Maimonides and the Aristotelian tradition, which associated man with form and woman with matter. Every human fault or failing is due to matter rather than to form; however, there is a good kind of matter (which Maimonides likened to *eshet hayil*—i.e., the virtuous wife of Prov. 31) that does not seek to overcome the form but instead serves and helps it.⁵¹ Anatoli

⁴⁹ *The Sayings of the Arabs* was occasionally called *Sefer ha-musar*; see n. 23 above. It is possible to suggest how Anatoli came to use our anecdote. “Forget your people and your father’s house” in the psalm must have struck a parallel with “She who abandons the qualities of her father and learns the qualities of her husband to the point that those who see her say that she is the daughter of her husband” found in chapter 47 of *The Saying of the Arabs* (see above). Later in chapter 47 and just before our anecdote, *The Sayings of the Arabs* mentions Rebecca as the model of the virtuous wife: “When talking about virtuous women happy with guests, the elders of the Arabs mention the speech of Rebecca when Eli‘ezer asked her ‘Is there room in your father’s house?’ and he did not ask but for room to sleep, yet she answered ‘There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room (to spend the night).’” It appears that once directed to the first anecdote in *The Sayings of the Arabs*, Anatoli then continued to the second anecdote (our anecdote). Anatoli’s use of *The Sayings of the Arabs* is another example of what Alfonso described as a “commentator’s acquaintance with and use of literary prose works on the vices and virtues of women”; see Alfonso, “Medieval Portrayals,” 140.

⁵⁰ See Anatoli, *Malmed ha-talmidim*, beginning at the bottom of p. 21a.

⁵¹ See Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines, with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 13, 31, 43, 430–433 (the introductions to Part I, I:6, I:17, and III:8, respectively); Grossman, *He Shall Rule Over You*, 99–101; Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Maimonides’ Strategy for Interpreting ‘Woman’ in the Guide of the Perplexed,” in *Écriture et réécriture des textes philosophiques médiévaux: volume d’hommage offert à Colette Sirat*, eds. J. Hamesse and O. Weijers (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 291–310; and Alfonso, “Medieval Portrayals,” 135–138.

thus presented the bride (i.e., the soul, the matter for the intellect, *homer la-sekhel*) as needing to serve and cling to the groom (i.e., the intellect, the form of the soul, *šurat ha-nefesh, šelem he-'adam*) in order to assist the groom in being actualized. Just as the bride is instructed to forget her people and just as Rebecca left her homeland for Isaac, so must the soul abandon its baser parts for its intellectual part and so must matter accept and serve its form. While the philosophical ideas in the sermon were hardly original, Anatoli's sermon is interesting for utilizing Psalm 45, which, as far as we can tell, was not usually a point of reference in the philosophical discussions about women.⁵² The traditional Jewish interpretation of this psalm often interpreted the king as the messiah and the bride as the congregation of Israel (*keneset Israel*). By using material from our anecdote and giving a philosophical-allegorical interpretation, Anatoli succeeds in domesticating the psalm from its royal setting (by recasting it as addressing the relationship between every husband and wife) while reading it as reflecting the relationship between the soul and the intellect.⁵³

The fact that the marriage advice of a pre-Islamic Arab queen ended up serving as material for a philosophical-allegorical Hebrew sermon on the relationship between the soul

⁵² Indeed, in his commentary on the Psalms, Menaḥem ha-Me'iri summarizes Anatoli's interpretation without mentioning the latter's name but notes that "these things [i.e., these interpretations] are good in and of themselves, but the plain meaning of scripture does not fit them well." See Menaḥem b. Shelomo ha-Me'iri, *Perush le-sefer tehilim*, ed. Joseph b. Ḥayyim ha-Cohen (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1936), 96. Anatoli's interpretation is also reflected in the commentary on Psalm 45 of Malbim (Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel, d. 1879). For an interesting place where the Psalm appears in instruction of women, see Pamela Sheingorn, "The Wise Mother': The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 112.

⁵³ We would like to thank Kalman Bland for discussing this sermon with us and clarifying some of its philosophical aspects.

and the intellect is certainly quite remarkable. However, Anatoli's sermon provides us with another interesting detail. Even though our anecdote is purportedly written by a mother to her daughter, we have no evidence before Anatoli's sermon that it was actually addressed to women. For, although non extant in the printed version of *The Goad of the Scholars*, at least two manuscripts of the work include a short note next to the title of the sermon: "This is appropriate for the wedding of a distinguished groom, and I composed it for the wedding of my daughter" (see Fig. 1 below).⁵⁴ It appears that, at least once, the content of Umāma's advice was spoken to an actual bride. However, it is quite telling that even in this case it was delivered by the bride's father rather than her mother.⁵⁵

(Fig. 1)

Three other Hebrew versions of the anecdote can be mentioned in passing, as their main importance is in providing the bridge between *Mishlei he- 'arav* and the two later Yiddish versions. Isaac Abohab's *Menorat ha-ma'or* (Spain, early fourteenth century) has a short version of the anecdote, which is introduced by the phrase "it has been said in a midrash." The anecdote is stripped of the core ten pieces of advice and contains merely the gist of the framing story, the introductory advice to serve the husband as if he were a king,

⁵⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Hébreu 216, 46v. Saperstein (whose translation we used) points to another manuscript: British Library Add. MS 26898; see his *Jewish Preaching*, 16.

⁵⁵ Of course, we have no way of knowing the relationship between the written sermon before us and the one that Anatoli delivered at his daughter's wedding. It seems likely that while Anatoli may have skipped a few of the exegetical tangents and perhaps some of the philosophical material at the wedding, he would not omit the parts of the conjugal relations and, with them, the content of our anecdote. Similarly, we also do not know the language in which the sermon was delivered. The issue of the language of the written sermon versus that of the preached one has been studied by Saperstein in *Jewish Preaching*, 39–44, and the question remains controversial. In any case, we doubt that a father would deliver a sermon that advises his daughter on marital behavior in a language that she does not understand.

and the suggestion that by being his servant he would be her slave and honor her as a lady.⁵⁶

A similar shortened version appears in Israel al-Neqawa's (Toledo, d. 1391) *Menorat ha-ma'or*, which adds a sentence to the effect that the mother would have preferred to die in childbirth together with her daughter than for the husband to detect anything repulsive in her daughter.⁵⁷ While the printed edition of al-Neqawa's work contains only this shortened version of the anecdote, *Sefer ha-musar* of Judah al-Khalaṣ, which was mostly based on al-Neqawa's work, contains the full anecdote as found in *The Sayings of the Arabs*.

Interestingly, *Sefer ha-musar* also contains the shortened version of the anecdote, suggesting either that Khalaṣ worked from a manuscript of al-Neqawa's *Menorat ha-ma'or* with both versions or that he added the longer version from *Mishlei he-'arav* to his work.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Isaac Abohab, *Menorat ha-ma'or*, ed. Yehuda Paris Horev (Jerusalem, 1961), 369. See also the next note.

⁵⁷ Israel al-Naqawa, *Menorat ha-ma'or*, 4 vols., ed. Enlow (New York, 1942), 4:34; see also p. 31. Much has been written on the relationship between the two *Radiant Lamps*; see Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Studies in Medieval Rabbinic Literature, vol. 2: Spain* (Jerusalem, 2004), 202–208 (“The Riddle of *Menorat ha-ma'or* and its solution”).

⁵⁸ Judah Khalaṣ and Moses Khalaṣ, *Sefer ha-musar*, ed. Abraham Joseph b. Moses Wertheimer (Jerusalem: Samuel Hanoah Lieberman, 1973; a reprint of the 1537 Constantinople edition), 155–156. Tracing the lives of the authors of *Sefer ha-musar* helps complete the map of the geographical peregrinations of our anecdote. Judah al-Khalaṣ (the first) was born in Castile but moved to Granada in 1477/6, to Malaga in 1482/1, and to Hunayn (on the coast of modern-day Algiers) in 1486/5, only to settle finally in Tlemcen. His *Sefer ha-musar*, however, was printed (and supplemented) by Moses b. Elazar al-Khalaṣ (Judah's nephew or grandson), who originated in Palestine and whose travels brought him to Constantinople, where he printed Judah's work in 1537. On the Khalaṣ family and *Sefer ha-musar*, see Shlomo Zalman Havlin, “le-toldot mishpaḥat al-Khalaṣ” (To the history of the al-Khalaṣ family) *Qiryat Sefer* 49 (1974), 644–646; and Abraham Joseph b. Moses Wertheimer, introduction to *Sefer ha-musar* (Jerusalem: Samuel Hanoah Lieberman, 1973), 11*–22*. See also p. 3 of the introduction to the 1537 Constantinople edition, where Moses Khalaṣ is rather vague about how he came by the manuscript of the work.

The Judeo-Arabic Versions

Before turning to the Yiddish versions of the anecdote, we must briefly mention two Judeo-Arabic versions. One is found in a bifolium from the Cairo Geniza (see Fig. 2). The anecdote is written on two sides of one leaf and contains the ten pieces of advice, arranged in pairs, and a concluding statement. The text is little more than a transcription of the Arabic anecdote in Hebrew letters.⁵⁹ While it is possible to reconstruct some of the codex to which this bifolium belonged, the beginning of the anecdote has not yet been identified. Therefore, it is not known what sort of framing story (if any) it contained. The leaf facing our anecdote contains a part of a Judeo-Arabic version of Solomon's throne midrash.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The Geniza fragment contains the concluding advice that the wife should prefer the husband's desire over her own, which is found in the two Iraqi versions but not in *The Unique Necklace*. The ninth and tenth pieces of advice in the Geniza fragment, "the more you glorify him, the more he will honor you" (incidentally, this is hardly two separate pieces of advice), is found only in *al-Fākhir*. However, notice that the Geniza version reverses the order of "his command" and "his secret," as is found in *The Unique Necklace*.

⁶⁰ Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Taylor-Schechter (T-S) Collection Arabic (Ar.) 16.4, ed. Oded Zinger, "Women, Gender and Law: Marital Disputes according to Documents from the Cairo Geniza" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2014), 394–397. The script suggests a date later than "the classical Geniza period" (i.e., after 1250). Through the help of the Genazim Project, and in particular Roni Shweka, we were able to check this shelf-mark in their computerized identification program when it was still under development (It now can be accessed through the Friedberg Project: www.jewishmanuscripts.org). The program identified another bifolio (T-S Ar.16.25, *Midrash Solomon's Throne* in Judeo-Arabic) and two separate leaves (T-S NS 90.35 and T-S Ar.48.152, both part of Ibn Shāhin's *Relief after Adversity*) as belonging to the same codex. Further research identified two further leaves (T-S Ar.18(2).115 and T-S NS 32.23) and three fragments that came together to form the title page of the midrash (T-S NS 70.63+T-S NS 70.108+T-S NS 288.196). The order of these leaves within the codex remains to be reconstructed. On the Judeo-Arabic *Solomon's Throne Midrash*, see Alon Tenami, "A Genizah Fragment of the Legend of King Solomon's Throne" [in Hebrew], *Ginze Kedem* 6 (2010), 197–210. We would like to thank Tenami for discussing this midrash with us.

(Fig. 2)

While the Geniza Judeo-Arabic version was transliterated directly from an Arabic version, the second Judeo-Arabic version was translated from Hebrew. In 1467, a certain cooker of silk named Joseph b. Yefet (Ḥasan) completed an adaptation of *The Saying of the Arabs* from Hebrew back to Arabic but in Hebrew script (i.e., Judeo-Arabic), which he titled *The Excellent Conduct (Maḥāsīn al-ādāb)*.⁶¹ In the introduction to the work, the author declares that its target audience is men and women of all ages.⁶² The chapters of this Judeo-Arabic work consistently follow the order of the Hebrew one, but the author drops the biblical quotes and the poetry intermingled with the prose sections. Its version of the anecdote closely follows the Hebrew but drops the frame story and much of the explanation of the advice. The language is much cruder, but its colloquial flavor may be closer to the way ordinary people spoke at the time than is the literary Hebrew of *The Saying of the Arabs*.⁶³

Two Yiddish Versions⁶⁴

⁶¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Hunt 488. See Adolf Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), no. 1220, p. 431; F16680 in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National Library of Israel. On this work, see David Torollo, “El *Mishlei he-‘arav* en sus versiones hebrea y judeo-árabe: traducción, recreación y adaptación,” in *Aliento: Échanges Sapientiels en Méditerranée 4*, edited by Marie-Christine Bornes-Varol and Marie-Sol Ortola (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2014), 157–175; and David Torollo, “Wisdom Literature in Judeo-Arabic: Kitāb maḥāsīn al-’ādāb” [The book of excellent conduct], *Memorabilia* 17 (2015), 90–114. The title of the work is derived from the Hebrew title by which *The Saying of the Arabs* was commonly known; see note 23 above.

⁶² See Torollo, “Wisdom Literature in Judeo-Arabic,” 95.

⁶³ See, for example, the second piece of advice: “When he sobers up, she [i.e.. the good wife] tells him: ‘you have enlivened my heart.’”

⁶⁴ We would like to thank Noga Rubín for pointing out to us the version of the anecdote in *Brantspiegel*, discussing the Yiddish versions of the anecdote, and providing us with important bibliography. Annegret Oehme generously offered some corrections to our English translations from Yiddish.

Al-Khalaṣ's *Sefer ha-Musar* and Abohab's *The Radiant Lamp* served as the sources for two Yiddish versions of the anecdote. The short version of *The Radiant Lamp* was translated by Moses Henochs Altschul-Jeruschalmi of Prague in his *Brantspiegel* (The burning mirror/The magnifying glass), first published in Krakow in 1596.⁶⁵ Al-Khalaṣ's *Sefer ha-musar* served as the primary source for Isaac ben Eliakum of Posen's *Sefer Lev Tov*, whose first extant edition (1620) is from Prague.⁶⁶ Similar to the way the move from Hebrew to Judeo-Arabic in *The Excellent Conduct* brought about a shift to an audience of both men and women, these two Yiddish works are also addressed to a different audience. *Brantspiegel* was specifically addressed to women readers, and *Sefer Lev Tov* was addressed to men and women alike.

⁶⁵ Moses Henochs Altschul-Jeruschalmi, *Sefer Brantspiegel* (Basel, 1602), 29b. On this work, see Jerold C. Frakes, ed. *Early Yiddish Texts, 1100–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 420–422, and Sigrid Riedel, *Moses Henochs Altschul-Jeruschalmi "Brantspiegel": Transkribiert und ediert nach der Erstaussgabe Krakau 1596* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993). It should be noted that *Sefer Brantspiegel* seems to have received another version of the anecdote from a source identified as *Musrei ha-filosofim*; see Altschul-Jeruschalmi, *Sefer Brantspiegel*, 66a. However, we could not find the anecdote in Yehuda al-Ḥarizi's *Musrei ha-filosofim* (a translation of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's *Kitāb ādāb al-falāsifa*).

⁶⁶ Isaac ben Eliakum of Posen, *Sefer Lev Tov* (Prague, 1620), 87b–88a. On this work, see Noga Rubin, *Conqueror of Hearts: Sefer Lev Tov by Isaac ben Eliakum of Posen, Prague 1620 – A Central Ethical Book in Yiddish* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2013), and Frakes, *Early Yiddish Texts, 1100–1750*, 536. Rubin suggests that the 1620 edition may have been preceded by an earlier shorter edition; see Rubin, *Conqueror of Hearts*, 51–58. Since *Sefer ha-musar* had two versions of the anecdote, *Sefer Lev Tov* also has two versions of the anecdote. Interestingly, the longer Yiddish version of our anecdote has been available in English translation for many years in the classic Jacob Marcus Sourcebook, originally published in 1938: Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World, A Source Book: 315–1791*, revised edition with an introduction and revised bibliography by Marc Saperstein (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999), 505–507.

The new context of the anecdote is evident in the Yiddish versions. Gone are the statements that men are lauded according to their liberality or the mention of male or female slaves, statements that no longer fitted the Jewish Eastern European context. The change of language and audience is also reflected in the more informal, speech-like quality of the Yiddish works and in subtle adjustments of the text to make it more appealing to women readers. Regarding the change to a more colloquial tone, here, for example, are the last two sentences of the queen's introduction in *Sefer ha-musar* (quoted from *Mishlei he-'arav*): "I hereby command you with ten matters, the glory of the honorable lady. Memorize⁶⁷ them in your heart and your husband shall cling to you and love you." And here is *Sefer Lev Tov*'s version of the same: "I command you these ten matters, if you follow my testament it will be good for you and if you do not follow my testament it will not be good for you. Therefore take to your heart these ten matters and ponder them day and night, early and late. If you will do this, your husband will love you like the heart in his body."⁶⁸ Similarly, the Yiddish texts substantially soften the edge of some of the statements regarding the husband-wife relationship. *Brantspiegel*, for example, takes Abohab's "If you will be his servant, he would be your slave and honor you as a lady, but if you be arrogant towards him, he will be your master against your will and you will be as worthless to him as one of the female slaves" but omits the last part to arrive at the following: "If you will treat him as a king, he will be to you like a slave and honor you and provide you with all you need. But if you dominate him, he will be your master against your will."⁶⁹ In *Sefer Lev Tov* the same goal is achieved by adding a small remark. In *Sefer ha-musar* the fourth piece of advice is to preserve the husband's wealth and not give any of it away without his permission. *Sefer Lev Tov* repeats

⁶⁷ It seems al-Khalaṣ read שכני for שני, as found in *The Sayings of the Arabs*.

⁶⁸ Khalaṣ, *Sefer ha-musar*, 155, and Issac ben Eliakum, *Sefer Lev Tov*, 87b.

⁶⁹ Abohab, *Menorat ha-ma'or*, 369, and Altschul-Jeruschalmi, *Sefer Brantspiegel*, 29b.

this advice but adds “except something small the likes of which he does not care about.”⁷⁰

Through these subtle changes, the Yiddish translators adapted the text of the anecdote to its new Yiddish women readership.

However, by far the most amusing change between the Hebrew and the Yiddish version is found in *Sefer Lev Tov*'s reworking of the advice regarding food. In *Sefer ha-musar* and *Mishlei he-'arav* the advice is, “Know the foods and dishes which he likes, make those to him and tell him you like only them.”⁷¹ However, in the Yiddish version the advice becomes, “Look after, pay heed and attention to the food he likes to eat and let these be your words: ‘my lord does not like to eat anything other than what I make for him.’”⁷² Truly, our Arabian queen has become a yiddische mama!

European Christian Versions

We have been able to locate at least two European Christian versions of the anecdote, one in Italian and one in Catalan.⁷³ Both are short, independent treatises, unlike the Arabic and Hebrew versions that were part of larger ethical works in which there is usually one or more chapters on the subject of women. Both treatises have been examined in the scholarship as part of the tradition of medieval didactic literature addressed to females that appears across Europe in various languages.⁷⁴ In fact, the Italian work was hailed in 1903 as the earliest

⁷⁰ Issac ben Eliakum, *Sefer Lev Tov*, 87b.

⁷¹ See ch. 47, lin. 33, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-'arab*,” 326.

⁷² Issac ben Eliakum, *Sefer Lev Tov*, 87b.

⁷³ The possibility of a connection between the anecdote from *Mishlei he-'arav* and similar advice in Italian literature around 1300 was hinted at by Dishon in *Good Woman, Bad Woman*, 204n8, where she points to Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983), 63.

⁷⁴ Alice A. Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique du moyen âge s'adressant spécialement aux femmes* (Cahors: Imprimerie Coueslant, 1903), 119–121, 189–191.

European example of the genre of motherly advice to a daughter, the more well-known work in the genre being the English *What the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*.⁷⁵ Today, of course, we would include Jewish and Hebrew works within the European literary tradition and point out the earlier version in *The Sayings of the Arabs*. More importantly, the ability to trace at least part of that literary tradition to Arabic and Hebrew sources makes it possible to explore the process of cultural translation and adaptation and to compare similar discourses in medieval Europe and the Islamic world.

The Italian work is entitled *I dodici avvertimenti che deve dare la madre alla figliuola quando la manda a marito* (The twelve warnings that a mother should tell her daughter when sending her to a husband), and, although we do not know the author, the work has been dated to around 1300.⁷⁶ As in the Hebrew and Arabic versions, the advice is framed with an introduction by a mother parting from her daughter and explaining to her that, while she would have been thrilled to keep her by her side forever, the marriage is for her well-being. She then gives her twelve pieces of advice, instead of the ten in the Hebrew and Arabic texts.

This Italian version is derived from the Hebrew *The Sayings of the Arabs* rather than directly from any of the Arabic versions. This provenance can be seen, for example, in the fact that the twelfth piece of advice in the Italian version warns the daughter of arousing her husband's jealousy—"Avoid any act, word or demeanor that may stir jealousy in your

⁷⁵ Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 119: "il présente certainement la forme la plus ancienne de ce genre d'enseignement que nous soit parvenue." On the English work, see Tauno Mustanoja, *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter, The Good Wife Wold a Pylgremage, The Thewis of Gud Women* (Helsinki, 1948).

⁷⁶ Pietro Gori, ed., *I dodici avvertimenti che deve dare la madre alla figliuola quando la manda a marito* (Firenze: Salani, 1885), 9. Without identifying the manuscript directly, Gori writes that the text was discovered in the middle of the nineteenth century in an old codex of Francesco Trucchi's. Gori dated the text to around 1300 and published it as a present for the wedding of his friends Paolo Baccani and Adele Landi. We would like to thank Rena Lauer and Elizabeth Mellyn for helping us obtain a copy of this work.

husband” (che tu non facci per opera, o per parole o per sembianti, onde al tuo marito possa entrare, o incorrere alcuna gelosia)⁷⁷—whereas we showed above that this advice does not appear in any Arabic version and that the author of *The Sayings of the Arabs* took it from other Arabic works. We also showed that *The Sayings of the Arabs* supplied more elaborate explanations than the Arabic versions: for example, adding to the fourth piece of advice about being thrifty with the husband’s wealth that “as men are praised for liberality, so it is proper for women to exert themselves in accumulating and girding themselves” (ki ka’asher yehullal ha-gever ha-mefazer ken lo’ ye’ot la-’ishah ki ’im hit’ameš likhnos ve-hit’azer).⁷⁸ The fourth piece of advice in the Italian not only contains the same explanation but follows the Hebrew almost literally: “as men are praised for being generous, women are praised for saving the husband’s things” (che siccome l’uomo è lodato d’esser largo, così la donna è lodata per salvare le cose del marito).⁷⁹

The second Christian version appears in another anonymous treatise, *Consell de bones doctrines* (Advice on good lessons), written in Catalan in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁸⁰ In this version, the introduction tells about a queen of France who is going to marry her daughter to the crown prince of England. When the heralds of the prince come to take the daughter away, she cries inconsolably, and her mother gives her sixteen (!) pieces of advice to comfort her and so that she can be happy and find honor with her husband in the new land. This version is the only one in which the daughter speaks at the end, telling her mother that now that she has received this advice, she feels very relieved and will follow it.

⁷⁷ Gori, *I dodici avvertimenti*, 15.

⁷⁸ See ch. 47, lin. 40–41, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-’arab*,” 327.

⁷⁹ Gori, *I dodici avvertimenti*, 11.

⁸⁰ Rosanna Cantavella, ed., *Alfons el Vell: Lletra a sa filla Joana, de càstig e de bons nodriments* (Gandia: CEIC Alfons el Vell, 2012), 81–91.

According to Alice Hentsch, this Catalan version is a poor imitation of the Italian *I dodici avvertimenti*.⁸¹ Rosanna Cantavella contests this view by claiming that, although both texts “belong to the same family,” there is no proof that the Catalan text derives directly from the Italian one.⁸² Now that we are familiar with the Hebrew and Arabic “family members” of these texts, we can confirm Cantavella’s claim, as it can be shown that the Catalan text is derived from *The Sayings of the Arabs* independently of the Italian. Notice, for example, that the Catalan version keeps the royal status of the couple as is found in the Hebrew version while giving them locally recognizable specificity (i.e., the queen of France and the crown prince of England), whereas the Italian version drops the royal status to make the anecdote what every mother should tell her daughter. The Catalan also preserves the precise framing story of the anecdote as in the Hebrew: the advice is given when the daughter starts crying upon being handed over to the heralds. Regarding the content of the advice, the fifth piece of advice in the Catalan version keeps the same instruction about drinking wine as in the second piece in *The Saying of the Arabs*, unlike the Italian version, which does not mention wine. In fact, as we saw before that the Italian version on occasions closely follows the Hebrew, so does the Catalan. It instructs the daughter, “And if by chance in that situation he tells you ‘drink,’ please him” (e si per ventura en aquell cas ell te dirà “beu,” fé-li’n plaer),⁸³ which parallels the Hebrew: “And drink if he commands you, as instructed” (*u-shti ’im yešawwekh ka-dat*).⁸⁴ This suggests that the Italian and Catalan versions represent two independent branches derived ultimately from the Hebrew text of *The Sayings of the Arabs*.

⁸¹ Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*, 189.

⁸² Cantavella, *Alfons el Vell*, 28 n. 1.

⁸³ Cantavella, *Alfons el Vell*, 86.

⁸⁴ See ch. 47, lin. 35–36, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-‘arab*,” 326.

The following chart presents a structural comparison between the two Christian versions and the Hebrew one:

(Fig. 3)

The comparison proves that the Italian and Catalan versions are derived from the Hebrew anecdote. However, it also reveals that the two Christian versions share features that do not appear in the Hebrew. Both Christian versions instruct the daughter not to leave the home, not to speak too much, and to be honest during intercourse. Moreover, the advice appears more or less in the same place in both versions. The most straightforward explanation of these commonalities that are not in the Hebrew source is that both Christian versions drew on an intermediary work that was based on *The Sayings of the Arabs*, most likely in Latin so both authors would have had access to it.⁸⁵

This structural comparison also offers an opportunity to explore the process of cultural translation, as we have done with the transmission from Arabic to Hebrew. By far the most noticeable addition in the Italian and Catalan versions is the mention of God in the introduction and conclusion of both texts. Let us consider the two conclusions. The Italian version says that the mother “blessed and crossed the good daughter and the calm maid, and commended her to God” (*benedisse et segnò la benigna figliuola et la mansueta pulzella, et raccomandolla a Dio*).⁸⁶ And the mother of the Catalan version wishes her daughter that “the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you forever” (*la benedicció de Déu lo Pare, e del Fill e del Sant Esperit sia sobre de tu empertostemps*).⁸⁷ The Catalan

⁸⁵ It is possible that Jacob Anatoli was the conduit for the transmission of the anecdote from Hebrew to Latin. As we noted above, he was familiar with the anecdote and collaborated with Christian scholars in translating works from Arabic to Latin. This, however, is mere speculation on our part.

⁸⁶ Gori, *I dodici avvertimenti*, 16.

⁸⁷ Cantavella, *Alfons el Vell*, 90.

version also adds the duty to love God and the Virgin as the first piece of advice. Religion was almost completely absent from the Arabic and Hebrew versions, and mentioning it assimilates the anecdote to a Christian milieu.⁸⁸

Several other changes in the Italian and Catalan versions reflect the new context of the anecdote. The advice to beware of jealousy because it leads to divorce was modified: in the Italian jealousy leads instead to the loss of love and the hate of the husband and his family and friends,⁸⁹ while in the Catalan jealousy is the cause for the removal of love and affection.⁹⁰ These changes probably reflect the strong opposition of the church to divorce. In the ninth piece of advice in the Catalan version, the mother advises her daughter to love even the husband's dogs, advice unthinkable in a medieval Jewish context.⁹¹ Lastly, the eleventh piece of advice in the Italian version includes the curious warning "neither to trust fortunetellers, nor their spells or bewitchings" (*nê dar fede a indovine, nè a loro fatture o incantazioni*).

Interestingly, similar advice appears in another Italian work, *Dialogi della morale filosofia* (Dialogues on moral philosophy), published in 1526 by the humanist Antonio Brucioli (1487–1566).⁹² The third of these *dialogi*, titled "Dello ufficio della moglie" (On the duty of the wife), consists of a dialogue in which Lucia instructs Lisabetta on the duties and obligations of the wife toward her husband. At the beginning of the dialogue, the use of two

⁸⁸ The significance of this addition is discussed in the section on gender issues below.

⁸⁹ Gori, *I dodici avvertimenti*, 15.

⁹⁰ Cantavella, *Alfons el Vell*, 88.

⁹¹ On Jews and dogs, see the articles in Phillip Aclrman-Lieberman and Rakefet Zalashik, eds., *A Jew's Best Friend: The Image of the Dog throughout Jewish History* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013).

⁹² See Antonio Brucioli, *Dialogi*, ed. Aldo Landi (Naples: Prismi Editrice; Chicago: Newberry Library, 1982), 49–56.

biblical quotations from the New Testament (Eph. 5:22 and 1 Pet. 3:6) seems to frame the advice within the Christian tradition. Later, material akin to the pieces of advice that we are tracking is scattered throughout Lucia's speech. The content is similar: not to be happy when he is sad, not to contradict the husband, to be always obedient to him, to love the husband's servants and family, to dress with modesty, to stay hiding at home if the husband is far away, not to avoid sexual intercourse, and even to accept that the husband prevails over the wife as the soul prevails over the body. The main structural difference in relation to its possible precedent, *I dodici avvertimenti*, apart from the dialogue form, is that here the advice is unlisted, unnumbered, and much longer than any of the previous versions.

Cultural Translations: Some General Observations

Tracing the peregrinations of the anecdote from its earliest-known manifestations in Abbasid literature to the Iberian Peninsula and from there to Italy, Constantinople, and seventeenth-century Prague allowed us to detect many particular instances where the anecdote was adapted to fit new linguistic, religious, and social settings. Moving away from the particulars, this section will offer some general observations on the cultural translations of the anecdote. The next section will offer similarly general observations on issues of gender.

The structure of the anecdote is a key aspect of its adaptability to new contexts and, indeed, to its appeal and success. The framing story, the mother's introduction, and especially the numbered list of advice provided a basic skeleton that lent itself to easy adaptation. Numbered lists were appealing for organization and memorization, and allowed the adapters to retain the general order and content of the advice while adapting it to new

contexts.⁹³ This could be done by adding, deleting, or altering the explanation given to each piece of advice or by adding new pieces of advice, as was done in the Christian versions.

Thus, the structure of the anecdote allowed adapters to take a modular approach to its content: adding, dropping, or modifying material in accordance with the new contexts.

A bird's-eye view of the anecdote's travels also reveals the tension between historical specificity and generality. While the original Arabic text revolves around the marriage of a specific Arab queen in a given historical context (a consolidation through marriage of an alliance between a royal south Arabian tribe and a northern tribe), the version in *Nathr al-durr* (and those derived from it) drops the royal frame story and presents the anecdote simply as the advice of an Arab woman to her daughter at the latter's marriage. The Hebrew version in *The Sayings of the Arabs* has an unnamed (presumably Arab) queen, while later Jewish versions have simply "a wise woman." In the Catalan version, as we have seen above, the idea of a queen is retained but localized through the marriage of a French princess to the crown prince of England, while the Italian version opts for advice that every mother should tell her daughter. Historical specificity in the anecdote is relevant only in the plot, which is neatly contained in the framing story. Adapters could therefore negotiate the tension between specificity (which implies a sense of authenticity and the allure of royalty) and generality (which provides universality) simply by dropping or adapting the framing story without changing the core of the anecdote.

The tension between historical specificity and generality is closely related to the process of assimilating the anecdote to new contexts. In the *Sayings of the Arabs*, the anecdote's Arabic origin is clear, and the work in general enjoys the authority and esteem

⁹³ On the general appeal of lists, see the articles in Lucie Doležalová, ed., *The Charm of a List: From the Sumerians to Computerised Data Processing* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009). We would like to thank Elizabeth Lambourn for bringing this collection to our attention.

accorded to the Arabic literary tradition up to the end of the fifteenth century in the Iberian Peninsula.⁹⁴ However, in the later Hebrew versions the Arabian origin was forgotten to the point that in Abohab's *The Radiant Lamp* (and later in the Yiddish *Brantspiegel*) the anecdote is introduced as an essentially Jewish text ("It has been said in a midrash"). Similarly, the inclusion of notably Christian advice in the Italian and Catalan versions (attending church, loving the Virgin) assimilates the anecdote into a Christian context.

The process whereby "imported" material is assimilated to a new context can also be seen by observing the company the anecdote keeps when it is part of a larger work. *The Excellent Conduct* declares itself to be a translation of a Hebrew book called *Sefer Musar* (Book of ethics), which is another name by which *The Sayings of the Arabs* was known. Moreover, *The Excellent Conduct* drops the part of the introduction in which the author of *The Sayings of the Arabs* describes his book as a translation of an Arabic work. The result is

⁹⁴ The prestige of the Arabic tradition in northern Christian Iberia and the absorption, in the new Romance context, of the Judeo-Arabic culture developed in al-Andalus have been studied by some scholars; see Yom Tov Assis, "The Judeo-Arabic Tradition in Christian Spain," in *The Jews of Medieval Spain: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 111–124, who claims that "Arabic remained the language of the intellectual and religious elite in Jewish society within the Hispanic kingdoms" (116), and Eleazar Gutwirth, "Asher b. Yehiel e Israel Israeli: actitudes hispano-judías hacia el árabe," in *Creencias y culturas: cristianos, judíos y musulmanes en la España medieval*, ed. Carlos Carrete Parrondo and Alisa Meyuhás Ginio (Salamanca: University of Salamanca; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1998), 97–111, who demonstrates that "en el Toledo cristiano, más de dos siglos después de su reconquista, la comunidad judía se describe como un lugar en el cual se conoce el árabe y en el cual la traducción del árabe al hebreo de unas fórmulas legales es cuestión de interés y de competencia de gran parte de la comunidad" (103). Furthermore, Pieter van Koningsveld claims, in "Andalusian-Arabic Manuscripts from Christian Spain: A Comparative Intercultural Approach," *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992): 75–110, that there is "evidence to a continuous transmission of Andalusian-Arabic MSS among the Muslim and Jewish communities of Christian Spain, from the time of the *Reconquista* until the expulsion of these communities from the Iberian Peninsula" (93).

that a reader of *The Excellent Conduct* would not know that she is reading a work of Arabic origin. Furthermore, a look at the other works included in the codex—Arabic translations of liturgical poetry by Sa‘adya and Arabic translations of other prayers—suggests that Joseph b. Yefet is presenting the content of *The Excellent Conduct* as Jewish.⁹⁵ Similarly, reconstructing the original codex that held the Geniza bifolium reveals that our anecdote was placed alongside a Judeo-Arabic version of *Solomon’s Throne Midrash* and Ibn Shāhīn’s Judeo-Arabic *Relief after Adversity*. While we do not have the beginning of the anecdote and thus do not know whether it contained a framing story, the other works contained in the codex suggest that the original Arabian context of the anecdote was put aside and the list of advice integrated into a Jewish context.⁹⁶ Through such transformations, Umāma bint al-Ḥārith could be reincarnated anew, once as a French princess and once as a yiddische mama, while all the time retaining the core structure and message of the anecdote.

These negotiations, between historical specificity and generality and between presenting the anecdote as a foreign piece of wisdom and as an internal tradition, bespeak the predicament of the adapters. On the one hand, part of the allure and, indeed, authority of the anecdote lies in its antiquity and foreignness. On the other hand, foreignness can distance the text from its readers, either because the Arabian heritage may no longer have an appeal in seventeenth-century Yiddish circles or because claiming that men were created for women

⁹⁵ For the content of the manuscript, see its entry in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National Library of Israel. See also Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts*, no. 1220, p. 431, with corrections in Malachi Beit-Arie, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: Supplement of Addenda and Corrigenda to Vol. 1 (A. Neubauer’s Catalogue)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), no. 1220, pp. 198–199.

⁹⁶ On drawing conclusions about the nature of a work from the company it keeps in the same codex, see Felicity Riddy, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” *Speculum* 71:1 (1996), 66–86, especially 70–71.

would be too jarring to someone familiar with the biblical creation story. Crossing religious and cultural boundaries, our anecdote is a particularly good case study of such negotiations.

Gender aspects of the anecdote

Having explored in some detail the peregrinations of the anecdote and its transformations in new lands, languages, and genres, we must ask: What made this list of advice so popular? Texts are not translated, adapted, and circulated by themselves; they need people, and these people must see something in the texts that appeal to their tastes and interests. While earlier we suggested that the literary framework of a numbered list of advice made it especially appealing for adaptation, here we are concerned with what cultural work such an anecdote does in terms of gender roles.⁹⁷

At the most basic level, instructing young wives in how they should behave delineates the world that they are supposed to inhabit, and in our anecdote this world is essentially the home. The wife is charged with making sure that everything in the home is perfect and runs

⁹⁷ Much has been written on the nature and effect of the images of the ideal wife in medieval literature. In this section we are not exploring uncharted territories but rather distilling what we think is most relevant to our anecdote. See Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique*; Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 83–121; Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, 46–75; Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475–1640* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1982), 47–56; Suzanne W. Hull, *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women* (London: AltaMira Press, 1996), 29–52; Rudolph M. Bell, *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 220–278; Silvana Vecchio, “The Good Wife,” in *A History of Women in the West, vol. 2: Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 105–135; and Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose, eds., *The Good Wife’s Guide, le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book, Translated, with a Critical Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). On works that are not Christian and European, see Dishon, *Good Woman, Bad Woman*; El Cheikh, “In Search for the Ideal Spouse”; and Lev Weitz, “Al-Ghazālī, Bar Hebraeus, and the ‘Good Wife,’” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134 (2014), 203–223.

smoothly. The preparation of the right type of food, making sure the husband sleeps well, and the proper management of servants puts us squarely in a middle-class settings. Even though the anecdote often describes the advice of a current queen to a future one and originally was set in pre-Islamic Arabia, these texts seem to target a middle- to upper-middle-class urban audience.⁹⁸

The mother's advice presents marital bliss as conditioned on the wife's being utterly relational to her husband. The mother does not instruct her daughter how to cultivate a relationship with her husband or how her family should function. Neither is the wife supposed to counsel the husband prudently nor is her silence subversive in any way.⁹⁹ Instead, the emphasis is solely on creating the perfect wife who exists entirely for her husband. Furthermore, this relationship is one of care. She has to make sure that all his needs are met: his sleep, his food, his house. This position of care requires her to completely erase herself: she must be one who "abandons the qualities of her father and learns the qualities of her husband to the point that those who see her say that she is the daughter of her husband" and is reminded that "you will not obtain all of this until you prefer his desire to your

⁹⁸ The urban middle-class settings of such advice have been noted in Riddy, "Mother Knows Best," 67. See also Ann Rosalind Jones, "Nets and Bridles: Early Modern Conduct Books and Sixteenth-Century Women's Lyrics," in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays in Literature and the History of Sexuality*, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Methuen, 1987), 52-63. For an example of advice in a rural setting, see Bell, *How to Do It*, 251-258.

⁹⁹ Compare with Sharom Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives" *Speculum* 61 (1986), 517-543; Carolyn P. Collette, "Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: A Context for the 'Melibee'" *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1995), 416-433; Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "The Powers of Silence: The Case of the Clerk's Griselda," in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, eds. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 230-249.

anger.”¹⁰⁰ By demanding from the wife that her husband never see anything unseemly in her, never smell a bad smell, never encounter resistance or an opinion contrary to his own, the anecdote instructs her to internalize the gaze of her husband.¹⁰¹ Beyond his gaze there is also his anger, always on the verge of erupting: if his food is not ready on time, he will be angry; if his sleep is disturbed, he will be angry. The home is not constituted as a safe feminine space; the wife must constantly check herself to avoid this male anger, which is presented as natural.¹⁰² While the anecdote was probably written by men and primarily for men, having the advice come from a woman, particularly her mother, gives authority and legitimacy to the demands of self-erasure and the internalization of the husband’s gaze and anger.¹⁰³

Furthermore, the mother represents a “success story”: having been married for many years

¹⁰⁰ See ch. 47, lin. 3–4, in Torollo, “El *Mišle he-‘arab*,” 325; Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī, *al-Mu‘ammarūn wa-l-waṣāyā*, 120, and T-S Ar.16.4. The demand for self-negation appears perhaps most emphatically in the Hebrew version when the daughter starts crying and her mother immediately cuts her off with “restrain yourself, my daughter, lest the one who wants to be happy with you shall be upset.” Indeed, the very first words of the mother are “restrain yourself.” The husband’s happiness must take precedence over the wife’s crying. Her voice is silenced, even if she is simply crying, so he can rejoice.

¹⁰¹ “These [characteristics] place a heavy burden on the wife and reflect the demanding role that the wives were ideally expected to play. All these [characteristics] are related to aspects of serving the husband. . . . Not only does she have to care for his well-being both practically and emotionally; in the process she is asked to internalize, even efface, her own needs as well as her own feelings of sadness and unhappiness,” El Cheikh, “In Search for the Ideal Spouse,” 187.

¹⁰² “Men in [*le Ménagier de Paris*] are angry or potentially angry all the time,” Greco and Rose, *The Good Wife’s Guide (Le Ménagier de Paris)*, 41.

¹⁰³ See Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient*, 16, and Tova Rosen, “Representaciones de mujeres en la poesía hispano-hebrea,” in *La sociedad medieval a través de la literatura hispanojudía: VI curso de cultura hispano-judía y sefardí de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha*, ed. Ricardo Izquierdo and Ángel Sáenz-Badillos (Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, 1998), 125.

and having raised the daughter, her instructions appear to be the recipe for similar success in the daughter's marriage.

While numerous medieval sources discuss the ideal husband, they usually describe his qualities (handsome, rich, pious, etc.) and advise him to respect his wife but do not require him to transform himself, internalize the female gaze, or erase himself.¹⁰⁴ Ethical works from the period often recommended to their (male) readers moderation and the pursuit of the Aristotelian mean, but no such moderation is recommended to wives, who are instead burdened with internalizing an ideal of perfection. Furthermore, wives should not expect their husbands to conform to an ideal of moderation, since their husbands are always on the verge of erupting in anger. Finally, the wife must not only transform herself according to the needs of the husband but also always appear happy with this transformation and never show him even a hint of displeasure. As John Stuart Mill wrote almost a century and a half ago: "Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments. All men, except the most brutish, desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favorite."¹⁰⁵

It is the wife's relational nature and self-erasure that makes the addition of religious content in the two Christian versions, especially the instruction to love God and the Virgin as the first commandment in the Catalan version, so significant. Although the theme is not developed in the anecdote, acknowledging women's religiosity works against their self-erasure by giving her a measure of worth. At the very least, it adds another relationship in her

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, El Cheikh, "In Search for the Ideal Spouse," 191–193, and Weitz, "Al-Ghazālī, Bar Hebraeus, and the 'Good Wife,'" 219–220. For a Jewish example, see Judah Ibn Tibbon's instruction to his son in Israel Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1926), 1:78 and 1:89–90.

¹⁰⁵ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: 1869), 26.

life, thereby reducing the exclusive claim her husband has over her. The attention to women's religiosity in the Christian versions of the anecdote, especially the pride of place given to the bride's religious duties, aligns these versions with other instructional works for women in medieval Europe, which tend to give women's religiosity even more space.¹⁰⁶

The attention to women's religiosity in the Christian versions of the anecdote seems to be indicative of a broader change common to the later versions. While the ideal of self-erasure remains at the core of all the versions, there appears to be a subtle yet undeniable softening of its harshness. Not only is religiosity introduced but, in the Catalan version, the daughter is given voice for the first time, as she promises her mother to follow the advice. In the Yiddish *Sefer Lev Tov*, we saw how the advice not to give away the husband's property was mitigated by the addition "except something small the likes of which he does not care about." Similarly, in *Brantspiegel* some of the harsher expressions about the wife being a slave to her husband were substantially softened. While all the versions of the anecdote leave much to be desired in respect of women's agency and independence, it is possible to trace both continuities and changes in gender perceptions across its travels.¹⁰⁷

Noticeably absent from all versions is any advice regarding children, perhaps the central goal of marriage across these different cultures. One possible explanation has to do with the framing story: this is the advice of a mother on the eve of her daughter's marriage,

¹⁰⁶ Beginning marital instructions with the wife's religious obligations is a prominent feature of several medieval conduct treatises for women. For several examples, see Borenstein, *The Lady in the Tower*, 48–49, 54, 64, and 71.

¹⁰⁷ We may hypothesize that some of the softening of the requirements for women has to do with the shift from "classical languages" (Arabic, Hebrew, and perhaps Latin) to vernacular languages (Judeo-Arabic, Yiddish, and perhaps Italian and Catalan). At least in the Jewish works, this shift is paralleled by the way the Yiddish and Judeo-Arabic works are explicitly directed to a mixed audience of men and women.

when the daughter might not be able to take in advice about something that looms in the future. Another possible explanation is that the role of a wife and the role of a mother are substantially different. While the wife's relationship to both her husband and her children is usually conceived as one of care, perhaps the kind of self-effacement demanded by our anecdote is tied specifically to her relationship with her husband. Put differently, introducing advice about raising children might have challenged the absolute claim the husband has over his wife.¹⁰⁸

When reading the different versions of the anecdote, one often wonders what relevance these normative texts had to social realities. Of course, since those contexts range from ninth-century Iraq to seventeenth-century Prague, a comprehensive discussion of the matter is beyond the scope of this study. However, the fact that the relationship between normative texts and social practice can be notoriously difficult to trace and prove does not mean that our discussion of such texts should be divorced from social realities. At least one particularly well-documented context in which a version of the anecdote is found, the Jewish community of medieval Egypt, suggests that its ideas would have enjoyed significant traction among different social strata.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ On the difference between education to be a wife and education to be a mother, see Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press: 2004), 198n6, and Vecchio, "The Good Wife," 106–107.

¹⁰⁹ While documentary sources from the Cairo Geniza do not show evidence of direct familiarity with the text of the anecdote, several Geniza documents include suggestive echoes of its ideas. Since a discussion of each text will take us too far afield, we confine ourselves here to pointing out the relevant texts: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Papyrus-sammlung Erzherzog Rainer (PER), H 82, translated into English in S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–93), 3:215; Mosseri collection II.195, v.8–9, currently in Cambridge University Library, edited and translated in S. D. Goitein, "A

Another way of relating normative texts to social realities is to compare the texts to legal expectations. To use again the case of the Jews in medieval Egypt, while the mother's advice in the anecdote does not contradict any Jewish law outright, it often works against the wife's legal rights. A clause common in marriage contracts of the time stipulates that the husband will sell a female slave that the wife hates, but the mother tells her daughter to love her husband's female slaves.¹¹⁰ Similarly, according to Jewish law a wife is entitled to maintenance (clothing and food) from the husband, but the mother tells her daughter that she should not make burdensome financial demands upon her husband. While not contradicting the law, these normative texts nevertheless elevate the ideal that wives ought not to demand their legal rights.¹¹¹ In a more general formulation, the portrayal of the ideal wife as utterly

Maghrebi Living in Cairo Implores His Karaite Wife to Return to Him," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 73 (1982), 138–145; T-S 13J8.23, most recently discussed in Eve Krakowski, "Female Adolescence in the Cairo Geniza Documents" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012), 227–243; see also the sources in Ortal-Paz Saar, "'And He Burned His Heart for Her': The Motif of Fire in Love Spells from the Cairo Genizah" [in Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 133–134 (Autumn 2012–Winter 2013), 217, 221, 225n49. Beyond the documentary Geniza, see also B. M. Lewin, ed. *Ošar ha-Ge'onim, volume 8: Ketubbot* (Jerusalem: Central Press, 1939), no. 428, pp. 169–170, discussed in Abraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Europe in the Middle Ages*, trans. from Hebrew by Jonathan Chipman (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 124–126, 215–216.

¹¹⁰ On the "hated slave" clause, see Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 3:147, and Amir Ashur, "Engagement and Betrothal Documents from the Cairo Geniza" [in Hebrew] (PhD dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 2006), 107–108.

¹¹¹ Similar examples can be found on the Islamic side. For instance, despite affirming the duty of the husband to support his wife, in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* al-Ghazālī approvingly relates a story about a wife whose husband intended to travel in which, when the neighbors ask her why she lets him travel when he is not providing maintenance, she answers: "Since I have known him, my husband has been a taker (*akkāl*) rather than a provider (*razzāq*) and I have the Lord as a provider." See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 2:65. One

relational and self-denying has a detrimental effect on women's ability to negotiate marital life with their husbands and families.¹¹² The broad effects of such normative ideals must be taken into account when considering medieval marriage through the framework of a "patriarchal bargain."¹¹³ When literary texts come together to create widespread normative discourse, they may have a profound effect on social realities.

Conclusion

Tracking the peregrinations of the anecdote from ninth-century Iraq to seventeenth-century Prague provides a particularly instructive case study in the circulation of popular ethical literature between different linguistic and religious communities along the medieval Mediterranean. While the transmission and translation of philosophical and medical works from Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin is well known, detailed studies of the transmission of popular ethical material are relatively few in number.¹¹⁴ The fact that this specific anecdote

recalls also the story of Rabbi Akiva and his wife; see Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubbot*, 62b. For an example in a Christian work that puts pressure on women to forgo their legal rights, see Greco and Rose, *The Good Wife's Guide (Le Ménagier de Paris)*, 39 and 119–120.

¹¹² See Carol M. Rose, "Women and Property: Gaining and Losing Ground," in her *Property and Persuasion: Essays on the History, Theory, and Rhetoric of Ownership* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 233–263, and Zinger, "Women, Gender and Law," 184–193.

¹¹³ In other words, such normative ideals can inhibit a wife from trying to obtain redress when her "patriarchal bargain" is broken. On the "patriarchal bargain," see Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 23–42, and Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2 (1988), 274–290. See the discussion in Zinger, "Women, Gender and Law," 199.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Y. Tzvi Langermann, "One Ethic for Three Faiths," in *Monotheism and Ethics: Historical and Contemporary Intersections among Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 197–218, and the work of the research group ALIENTO (Linguistic analysis, intercultural

often allows us to go beyond noting general parallels to trace direct links between versions places our comparisons on more secure footing.¹¹⁵ Along the way we discovered that works considered to be the earliest-known examples in Europe of the genre of motherly advice to a daughter are in fact part of an older tradition harking back at least to Abbasid literature through a medieval Hebrew intermediary. However, ours is neither a romantic-nationalistic search for origins, nor a Whiggish celebration of progress, but a genealogy intent on tracing both commonality and creativity through translation and adaptation.

Having examined each version of the anecdote in some detail, we now step back to look at the travels of the anecdote on a broad canvas:

(Fig. 4)

It is hard not to be impressed by the vitality shown by the anecdote. The map demonstrates the connectivity of the medieval Mediterranean and the porous nature of political, religious, and linguistic borders when it comes to popular ethical literary material.¹¹⁶ This connectivity, however, is not an inherent and essential quality, but is contingent on specific historical contexts and manifests in particular directions. Thus, one can discern in the map above the slow pendulum-like movement of the anecdote, first from Iraq to Spain, and then, after the turn of the thirteenth century, back east through either the European route or the North African coast. Similarly, this connectivity is not only a function

aspects of sapiential utterances and their transmission from East to West and West to East) in Paris and Nancy, France, and its regular publication, *Aliento: Échanges Sapientiels en Méditerranée*, which includes studies dealing with the transmission of popular ethical and sapiential material across medieval traditions.

¹¹⁵ The difficulties in tracing the sources for medieval works of Adab have often been mentioned. See Yehudah Ratzaby, “Pitgamei ‘adab’ be-sifrut yemei ha-beinayim,” *Ošar yehudei Sefarad* 4 (1960/1961): 116.

¹¹⁶ “Connectivity” is presented as a central feature of Mediterranean history in Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 123–172.

of geography, though this certainly plays a role; rather, it suggests shared normative conceptions of gender roles among at least some of the urban middle class along the shores of the Mediterranean. While the cultures along the medieval Mediterranean held different religious ideas and spoke different languages, they shared much in common regarding the behavior expected of wives.¹¹⁷ The attractiveness of the anecdote attests to broadly shared perceptions, while the permutations of each incarnation highlight intriguing differences in outlook.

Tracing the travels of the anecdote in space and time, we have tended to read changes as the “expression of a society’s response to a story, the result of its encounter with a different cultural experience.”¹¹⁸ However, interpreting changes as expressions of cultural encounter runs the risk of essentialism. When we trace how our anecdote appears in Muslim, Jewish, and Christian works, there is a great temptation to associate every change with presumed inherent differences between certain religious or cultural contexts.¹¹⁹ It seems safe enough to ascribe the addition of advice regarding drinking to the movement of the anecdote

¹¹⁷ The broad horizons of the anecdote can be used to check arguments that try to locate texts in specific local conditions. For example, in her important study on “What the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter,” Riddy argues that the *sitz im leben* of the text is the “widespread movement of adolescents from the country to the town, as well as within towns.” A written text, she argues, was not needed for daughters living at home who are instructed informally by their parents but for urban youth socialized away from their families; see Riddy, “Mother Knows Best,” 71–72. However, the circulation of the anecdote shows that similar texts were written down in many places with different social circumstances.

¹¹⁸ Rella Kushelevsky, “Intercultural Encounters in Collective Narratives: The Transition of ‘The Shining Robe’ from North Africa to Ashkenaz via Provence,” *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013), 260.

¹¹⁹ This point is made, in a quite a different context, in Justin K. Stearns, *Infectious Ideas: Contagion in Premodern Islamic and Christian Thought in the Western Mediterranean* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 160–167.

from Arabic to Hebrew. Similarly, we suggested that the replacement of “divorce” with “loss of love” in Christian works can probably be attributed to the different religious and cultural context. However, the danger becomes apparent when we notice, for example, that only the Italian and Catalan versions contain advice about leaving the home as little as possible. Are we to deduce from this that there was greater concern regarding the intermingling of the sexes in public in Christian circles than in Jewish and Muslim circles? Or perhaps this advice was unnecessary in a Jewish and Muslim context because such intermingling did not take place? Both of these suggestions are unsatisfactory, and it is often difficult to decide when we should attribute a textual change to a religious, geographic, temporal, or cultural change. We have no simple solution to offer to this problem except to stay alert to the danger and hope that caution will protect us from it.

In tracing the genealogy of the anecdote, we followed a diachronic approach that sought “genetic” relations between texts.¹²⁰ However, a synchronic approach that examines each version in relationship to similar texts within its own literary tradition is certainly possible and desirable. Thus, our anecdote could be fruitfully compared with the classical tradition of “estate management” represented by works of Xenophon, pseudo-Aristotle, and Bryson.¹²¹ We mentioned above that classical Arabic literature relates dozens of anecdotes of parental instructions for married life, some similar to the advice of Umāma bint al-Ḥārith, while others are quite different. In one such anecdote, for example, a mother advises the following

¹²⁰ For an illuminating study that similarly traces a tale in Arabic, Hebrew, and Castilian sources, see Luis Giron-Negron, “How the Go-Between Cut Her Nose: Two Ibero-Medieval Translations of a Kalilah wa-Dimnah Story,” in *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, ed. Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 231–259.

¹²¹ On this classical tradition and its Hebrew and Arabic continuations, see Part II of Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*.

upon her daughter's marriage: "Pull out the tip of his spear. If he lets you do that, pull out its head. If he lets you do that, break bones with his sword. If he lets you do that, cut meat on his shield. If he lets you do that, place a saddle on his back for he is nothing but a donkey."¹²²

The existence of such advice on how to domesticate one's warrior husband may put Umāma's advice in a different light. Conversely, the fact that we do not find comparable marital instruction in Jewish texts until a rather late period lends the anecdote greater weight in its consideration within a Jewish context.¹²³ Finally, there is the much-studied European tradition of didactic literature represented in such famous titles as *What the goodwife taught her daughter*, *Le Ménagier de Paris*, and *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de La Tour Landry* (or, in Caxton's English translation, *The Book of the Knight of the*

¹²² Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, 4:76. This advice appears in other works; for example, Manṣūr b. Ḥusayn al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, 6:150–51, and al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 2:51. From Arabic, this anecdote reached the Syriac Christian work of Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, ed. Paulus Bedjan (Lipsiae: Otto Harrassowitz, 1898), 150–151. The Syriac version clarifies that such advice comes from "an evil woman." While in Arabic it can be assumed that every husband is also a warrior, the Syriac version must present the advice as occasioned by a marriage to a soldier (*gabrā pālḥā*). We would like to thank Lev Weitz for bringing the Bar Hebraeus version to our attention.

¹²³ While it is possible to point to fleeting examples in the Talmud such as Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat*, 140b, or to later works such as *Tiferet baḥurim* and *Brantspiegel*, perhaps the most illuminating comparison is between the self-erasure recommended in the anecdote and the celebration of the active wife of Proverbs 31. The comparison becomes even more interesting if one reads the whole of Proverbs 31 as the admonition of a mother to her son. On *Brantspiegel*, see n. 65 above; on *Tiferet baḥurim*, see Roni Weinstein, *Juvenile Sexuality, Kabbalah, and Catholic Reformation in Italy: Tiferet Bahurim by Pinhas Barukh ben Pelatiyah Monselice*, translated from Hebrew by Batya Stein (Leiden: Brill, 2009). On Proverbs 31, see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Seventh Pillar: Reconsidering the Literary Structure and Unity of Proverbs 31," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113 (2001), 209–218.

Tower).¹²⁴ While we could not carry out such investigations due to limitations of space and expertise, we believe that the significance and meaning of each version of the anecdote can be studied in relation not only to other versions but to similar texts in its own literary tradition.

Tracking Umāma bint al-Ḥārith's advice led us from pre-Islamic Arabian genealogy to Maimonidean philosophy, Italian Renaissance literature, and popular Yiddish works of ethics. As our footnotes attest, we have been guided in these foreign territories by many specialists. Noting this fact is not merely a matter of academic ethics and friendship; it goes to the heart of what is required in a project such as this. In our age of narrow specialization, no one can master all the languages and technical skills needed in order to move from sixth-century Arabia to seventeenth-century Prague with confidence. However, staying within one's specialization means missing the connections that exist between regions, religions, eras, and cultures. Through cooperation and taking risks, we have been able to follow and recover one thread out of a wide and infinitely rich tapestry. As we noted above, specialists can now examine how each segment of the thread relates to other threads within the same region and what meanings can be found in each relationship. We have no doubt that further cooperation will reveal new versions and variations of the anecdote in unexpected places.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ To take merely the general articles in *Le Ménagier de Paris*, we find among them obedience, care of the husband's person and his secrets, and caring for the servants—all also found in our anecdote. Rudolph Bell has also noted that every precept from the *I dodici avvertimenti* "appears somewhere in Renaissance popular print culture." See Bell, *How to Do It*, 223.

¹²⁵ Indeed, Umāma bint al-Ḥārith's advice is still with us. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, a Google search of her name in English or Arabic yields numerous results. When we presented very early finds about the anecdote in a seminar on Judeo-Arabic Literature in Jerusalem (thank you to Miriam Goldstein for the opportunity), one of the master's students, a teacher in an Arab high school for girls, got up excitedly and told us that Umāma bint al-Ḥārith's advice is part of the Israeli curriculum for high school Arabic literature. See

Yūsuf ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, *al-Kāfi fī sharḥ al-nuṣūṣ al-mukhtāra*, 2 vols. (Taybe: n.p., 1989), 1:220–225. (Thank you to Amal Odeh for this information.) Later we learnt that the same is true in the UAE (or at least was in 1996/7); see Kahf, “Braiding the Stories,” 153n13.