

AL-WAṬWĀṬ'S DESCRIPTION OF JEWISH FESTIVALS – PROBING THE SOURCES OF HIS KNOWLEDGE

HAGGAI MAZUZ

School of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University, China
Tang Jia Wan, 519082, Zhuhai, P. R. China
e-mail: hagaimazuz@gmail.com

The Egyptian historian Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Yahyā al-Kutubī, known as al-Waṭwāt (1235–1318 CE), in his *Mabāhij al-Fikar wa-Manāhij al-'Ibar*, describes seven Jewish festivals. This paper references these descriptions and attempts to trace their provenance. It is found that many of his descriptions are sourced to two earlier Muslim scholars. Some apparent analogies and allusions, however, are found between al-Waṭwāt's accounts and a broad array of Jewish sources.

Key words: al-Waṭwāt, Jewish festivals, al-Maḡdisī, al-Bīrūnī, Jews of Egypt.

Introduction

Mediaeval Muslim authors took an immense interest in non-Muslims. Their reasons oscillated between inquisitiveness to polemic. Although many works were written on the topic (e.g., Lazarus-Yafeh 1996; Waardenburg 1999), some texts have remained unstudied. This is the case of the Egyptian historian Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Yahyā al-Kutubī, known as al-Waṭwāt (1235–1318 CE),¹ one of the earliest historians in the Mamluk period (1250–1517 CE). His best-known work, *Mabāhij al-Fikar wa-Manāhij al-'Ibar*, is an encyclopaedia of natural sciences and geography. In the ninth chapter of the first section, he discusses festivals of nations, the Jews among them.

Antonella Ghersetti justifiably notes that al-Waṭwāt has been somewhat neglected in modern scholarship (Ghersetti 2013, p. 72). As a reflection of this, there is no entry on him in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. He briefly describes seven festivals in the following order: *Ro'sh ha-Shanah*, The Day of Atonement, Festival of Booths,

¹ On his life and work, see Ghersetti (2013; 2015).

Passover, Pentecost, Purim, and Hanukkah (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 216–218). In the discussion that follows, I describe this account, assess the extent of al-Waṭwāṭ's reliance on previous Muslim scholars on this topic, propose Jewish sources of information that may underlie his description, and estimate the influence of his presentation of the Jewish festivals on later Muslim scholars, in an attempt to remedy somewhat the lack of academic interest in this scholar.

Al-Waṭwāṭ's Guide to the Jewish Festivals

Ro'sh ha-Shanah: Al-Waṭwāṭ calls *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* *'īd ra's al-sana*, a literal translation of the Hebrew, and adds that “They (i.e., the Jews) call it *'īd ra's ha-yashā*, namely, *'īd ra's al-shahr*” (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 216–217). His words demonstrate that he received a corrupted version of the name of the festival and associates the timing of the first day of the festival with the head of the month (*Ro'sh Hodesh*). The festival falls on the first day of Tishrei, he says, and its status for the Jews is like that of the Festival of the Sacrifice (*'īd al-aḏḥā*) for the Muslims. The Jews, he reports, say that Allāh ordered Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on this day, but redeemed him with a great sacrifice (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 216–217).

It seems that al-Waṭwāṭ relied somewhat on *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-Ta'rīkh* by Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhīr al-Maqdisī (10th century CE),² who also called the festival *'īd ra's al-shahr* and used a similar (and more accurate) transliteration of *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* (*rāsh ha-shanā*). Alternatively, both borrowed from the same source. Al-Maqdisī also mentions the binding (al-Maqdisī 1907, Vol. 4, p. 37), but al-Waṭwāṭ adds that the status of *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* for the Jews is like the Festival of the Sacrifice for the Muslims and his description of the festival is clearer and better organised than is that of al-Maqdisī.

The Day of Atonement: Al-Waṭwāṭ calls this festival *'īd ṣawmārāyyā* (صوماریا) (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217), possibly due to a mistake in the diacritical mark. The correct word is *rabbā*, i.e., the great fast, a name used for the Day of Atonement in Aramaic in the Jerusalem Talmud (JT) – *ṣōmā rabbah* (צומא רבא) (JT *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* 8b [1:4]; JT *Yōmā* 41a [8:4]). The first *alif* should be part of the word *ṣawmā* and the name of the festival should be given in two words (صوما ربا) and not in one word as it appears. Here al-Waṭwāṭ again follows al-Maqdisī who also refers to the fast in this manner, but accurately (al-Maqdisī 1907, Vol. 4, p. 37).

Then al-Waṭwāṭ explains that this observance is called *al-kibbūr* (a corrupted form of the Hebrew name of the fast, *Kippūr*), the great fast (*al-ṣawm al-'aẓīm*) that the Jews were ordered to observe. Those who do not fast are executed. The fast, al-Waṭwāṭ continues, lasts twenty-five hours. It starts one hour before Tishrei's ninth sunset and ends one hour after it on the tenth. This is why it is sometimes called *al-'āshūr*, the tenth (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). In this part of his account, he

² On al-Maqdisī's life and work and his account of Jewish festivals, see Adang (1996a, pp. 66–67; 1996b, pp. 259–260).

relied on *Kitāb al-Āthār al-Bāqiya 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliya* by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī (973–1048 CE),³ with two small differences: al-Bīrūnī argues that the fast starts half an hour before Tishrei's ninth sunset and ends half an hour after it on the tenth, and he writes *al-āshūrā* and not *al-āshūr* (al-Bīrūnī 1878, pp. 276–277).⁴

So far, al-Waṭwāṭ relied on al-Maqdisī and al-Bīrūnī in his account of the Day of Atonement. Although he borrowed some content from his predecessors, he is original in part of it, as far as I am able to ascertain. As a condition for breaking the fast, he says, one must see three stars. The Jews, he adds, believe that this day marks the end of Moses's forty-three-day fast (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217), probably in reference to Deut. 9:18, in which a forty-day fast is reported: "And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, for forty days and forty nights: I neither ate bread nor drank water because of all your sins that you sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger."⁵ Furthermore, he writes that the fast will not fall on Sunday, Tuesday and Friday (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). His statement corresponds to the Rabbinic rule of *lo' adū Ro'sh* (*adū* [ר"א] being an acronym composed of the initials representing the first [א], fourth [ד], and sixth [ו] days of the week), according to which *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* must not fall on these days (Maimonides 2008, p. 279 [7:1]; Abudraham 1963, p. 305).

Al-Waṭwāṭ adds that, according to the Jews' belief, on this day Allāh forgives all their sins excluding fornication with married women (*muḥṣanāt*), exploitation, and disbelief in Him (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). Here too, he follows al-Maqdisī (al-Maqdisī 1907, Vol. 4, p. 37).

The Festival of Booths: Titled *īd al-miẓallā*, a literal translation of the Festival of Booths (*hag ha-Sukkōt*). Al-Waṭwāṭ claims that it lasts seven days. The first day, he says, is the fifteenth of Tishrei and the last day is called *'arābā*, i.e., *shajar al-khilāf*, the willow tree (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). Notably, *'Arabah* refers to the *ḥabīṭat ha-'arabōt* custom – pounding willow branches on the floor of the synagogue in a remembrance of a Temple rite – on the last day of *Sukkōt*, *Hōsha'nā Rab-bah*. This name is used in Jewish sources and sometimes appears as *yawm 'Arabah* (see e.g., *Siddūr Rab Sa'adya Gaon* 1963, pp. 239, 251; see further, Avishur 1997, pp. 340–341). It recurs, although with a slight difference, *'arāfā*, in *al-Āthār al-Bāqiya*, a source that provides few details on the customs of the Jews on this day (al-Bīrūnī 1878, p. 277).

This is also their pilgrimage (*hajj*) time, al-Waṭwāṭ explains, probably referring to Exod. 23:14: "Three times shall you keep a festival (*taḥog*) unto Me in the year." During this time, they sit under *ẓilāl* (lit. shadows) of green palm branches stripped

³ On al-Bīrūnī's life and work and his account of Jewish festivals, see Boilot (1960); Schreiner (1886, pp. 263–266); Ratzaby (1990); Adang (1996b, pp. 92–93); de Blois (2014, pp. 71–72).

⁴ It deserves mention that al-Bīrūnī's words on the execution are probably in reference to Lev. 23:29, which is partially misunderstood, and his comments about *al-āshūr* are probably in reference to Num. 29:7.

⁵ Translation taken from *The King James Version of the English Bible* (1941). In certain cases, the translation is slightly modified to reflect (in my opinion) the Hebrew text more accurately.

of their leaves (*jarīd al-nakhl*), of olive branches, and of willow and other trees (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). From the context, it seems that in *ḡilāl*, al-Waṭwāt refers to thatching (*sekhakh*). Support for this is found in the prayer book of R. Sa'adya Gaon (882–942 CE), in which the same term for *sekhakh* is used (*Ṣiddūr Rab Sa'adya Gaon* 1963, p. 233). The most common *sekhakh* is an open palm frond. *Jarīd al-nakhl* in Hebrew is *kappot temarīm*, which, according to Lev. 23:40 is one of the four species that one must procure for the *Sukkōt* festival. In the Rabbinic tradition, it is identified as the *lūlah*, a closed frond of the date palm (Maimonides 2008, 7:1 [p. 265]). If so, al-Waṭwāt may have confused *sekhakh* with *lūlah*. As for the olive branches, they were probably used for decoration, being too short and thin to serve as *sekhakh*.

The Jews, al-Waṭwāt explains, say that dwelling in a booth reminds them of the shadows (*aḡlāl*) that Allāh provided their ancestors in the desert in the form of clouds (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). This is probably a reference by al-Waṭwāt to the Pillar of Cloud (*'amūd he-'anan*), also known as the Clouds of Glory (*'ananei ha-kabōd*) (e.g., JT *Yōmā* 2:1 [1:1]; Babylonian Talmud (BT) *Ta'anit* 9a; BT *Yeḥamōt* 72a), a Biblical manifestation of God's presence (e.g., Exod. 13:21–22, 14:19, 33:9–10; Num. 12:5, 14:14, 31:15). In BT *Sukkah* 11a, a disagreement appears regarding the meaning of Lev. 23:42: "I made the Children of Israel to dwell in booths." R. Eli'ezer claims that these booths were *'ananei ha-kabōd*; R. 'Aḡiba interprets the word "booths" in its literal sense. Egyptian Rabbanites in al-Waṭwāt's time (al-Waṭwāt himself does not identify them as Rabbanite, but one presumes that they were, because he cites a Midrash) appear to have been familiar with this Midrash and to have favoured R. Eli'ezer's view.

Passover: Titled *'īd al-faṭīr*, a literal translation of the Hebrew *ḡag ha-Maṣṣōt*, the Festival of the Unleavened Bread, the Biblical term for Passover (*Pesaḡ*) (e.g., Exod. 23:15). They call it, al-Waṭwāt says, *al-faṣḡ*. It falls on the fifteenth of Nisan and lasts seven days, during which they eat *maṣṣah* (*faṭīr*) and clean their houses from leavened bread (*khubbz al-khamīr*), because they believe Allāh saved the Israelites from Pharaoh and drowned him on these days. Following this, he continues, they came out to the desert, ate meat and *maṣṣōt*, and celebrated (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). Here al-Waṭwāt's account is basically identical to al-Maḡdisī's with one exception: al-Maḡdisī calls the festival *'īd al-faṭīr* only (al-Maḡdisī 1907, Vol. 4, p. 37).

Pentecost: Al-Waṭwāt calls the festival *'īd al-asābī*, a literal translation of *ḡag ha-Shabū'ōt*. This festival, he claims, occurs seven weeks after Passover (exactly as is written in Lev. 23:15), on the sixth of Sīvan (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). Al-Maḡdisī also presents such information, describing the festival very briefly without mentioning its date (al-Maḡdisī 1907, Vol. 4, p. 37). Al-Waṭwāt continues by reporting that the Jews say that Allāh spoke with the Israelites at Mount Sinai on this day. Pentecost, he specifies, is one of the Jews' three pilgrimage festivals, together with Passover, and *Sukkōt* (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). Here he refers to Exod. 23:14–17, which speak of the festival of the unleavened bread (*maṣṣōt*), the festival of the harvest (*qaṣīr*), and the festival of the ingathering of the grain (*asīf*). Al-Waṭwāt

identifies all three correctly.⁶ He adds that the Jews venerate *Shabū'ōt*, observing it by eating dumplings (*qaṭā'if*) and claiming that they are a substitute for manna (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217).

Al-Waṭwāṭ mentions two additional names for this festival which he probably learned from the Jews of his time: *'īd al-khiṭāb* and *'īd al-'anṣara* (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217).⁷ Both allude to the central event of this observance. The Jews, he reports, say that Allāh spoke (*khāṭaba*) with the Israelites from Mount Sinai on this day. Here he may have based himself on Deut. 4:12–13, which reports that in the revelation the Lord spoke (*va-yedaber*) and declared (*va-yagged*) His covenant unto the Israelites. *Al-'anṣara* may be a corruption of the Hebrew *ha-'Aṣeret*, given that another Hebrew name for Pentecost is *ḥag ha-'Aṣeret*, the festival of the assembly (Mishnah *Ro'sh ha-Shanah* 1:2). The name *al-'anṣara* is used in Jewish sources (see e.g., *Siddūr Rab Sa'adya Gaon* 1963, pp. 155–156; Gil 1983, Vol. 3, p. 104 [letter no. 460, TS 13 J 6, f. 22]; Allony 2006, p. 407 [list no. 108, TS K 3.42]; see further, Ashtor 1944, Vol. 2, p. 380). He may, however, have learned about it from al-Bīrūnī (1878, p. 281) who also used it.

Purim: This is the festival that al-Waṭwāṭ describes at the greatest length. After titling it *'īd al-fūr*, he says that the Jews innovated it,⁸ indicating that he draws a distinction between the Written and the Oral Law (although Purim originates in the Bible and not the Oral Law). His view of the origin of this festival also explains why his overview of the festival cycle is chronologically discontinuous. He adds that they call it *al-fūrayā* (الغوريا) (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 217). Here al-Waṭwāṭ uses a term that corresponds to the Aramaic name for Purim, *Pūrayā* (פּוּרְיָא) (e.g., JT *Ta'anit* 12b [2:12]; JT *Megillah* 6a [1:14]; BT *Megillah* 7b; BT *Sanhedrin* 12b), which was also in use in the Geonic period (7th–11th centuries CE).

Al-Waṭwāṭ then explains the background of the festival: Nebuchadnezzar (Bukhtnaṣar) exiled the Israelites from Jerusalem and settled them in Iṣfahān. During the reign of Ardashīr b. Bābik,⁹ king of Persia, whom the Jews call Aḥashverōsh (Aḥ-shārūsh), his vizier, Haman (Haymūn) envied Mordecai (Mardūkhāy), the Jewish sage (*ḥabr*), because the king had married Mordecai's cousin (i.e., Esther according to the Biblical account, although al-Waṭwāṭ does not mention her by name). Therefore, Haman planned to execute the Jews in the middle of Adar (i.e., the fifteenth of the month – the Biblical source refers to the thirteenth of the month as the time of the intended massacre [Esth. 3:13]). He chose this day because the Jews believed that on this day Moses was born and passed away and he meant to cause them even more sorrow (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218). Here al-Waṭwāṭ is wrong about the date, but it seems that he absorbed something about these occasions. After all, the date of Moses's

⁶ Notably, al-Bīrūnī (1878, p. 281) translated these verses into Arabic, but a comparison of both scholars' wordings makes it seem unlikely that al-Waṭwāṭ relied on him.

⁷ Interestingly, Pentecost has also many names in the Jewish tradition. See Halperin (1994, p. 51.)

⁸ The expression “innovated” denotes a festival of Rabbinic provenance.

⁹ Ardashīr b. Bābik was a Sassanid king (226–241 CE). The reason for identifying Ardashīr with Aḥashverōsh deserves a separate study.

birth and death is mentioned in the Talmud (BT *Megillah* 13b; BT *Nazir* 14a) as well as in *Seder 'Ōlam Rabbā* (Neubauer 1895, Vol. 2, pp. 40–41; Milikowsky 2013, Vol. 2:10, p. 249), a 2nd-century CE Jewish chronology ascribed to R. Jose son of Halaftā (BT *Niddah* 46b), as the seventh of Adar. Another possibility is that he borrowed from al-Bīrūnī (1878, p. 280) who reports that Haman (which he writes as Hāmān) asked the magicians to specify the worst time for the Jews. They replied: “Adar, [when] Moses their teacher died. The most unfortunate days for them are fourteenth and fifteenth of it” (al-Bīrūnī relies here on BT *Megillah* 13b).

Al-Waṭwāt continues: Mordecai discovered Haman’s scheme, brought it to the attention of his cousin who accordingly planned a stratagem (*hīla*) to save the Jewish people. She advised the king of the vizier’s jealousy of Mordecai and of his plan. The king had the vizier and the members of his household executed and issued a writ of protection (*amān*) for the Jews. Therefore, they celebrate this day and fast three days before it (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218). Here al-Waṭwāt is inspired by Esth. 4:16: “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Susa (Shūshan), and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days [...]” It is possible that he describes a custom among the Karaites, who follow the Biblical text literally,¹⁰ since Rabbanites observe only a one-day fast, on the thirteenth of Adar (the Fast of Esther, *ta’anit Ester*) (see Mirsky 1964, Vol. 2, p. 222 [79]). Support for this proposition comes from another Egyptian historian, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442 CE), who clearly states that the Karaites in Egypt fast from the thirteenth to the fifteenth (al-Maqrīzī 2003, Vol. 4/2, p. 946).¹¹

Ever since, he continues, the Jews celebrate and rejoice, including the exchange of gifts (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218). This is probably a reference to the “sending of portions to one another” (the *mishlōḥei manōt* – Esth. 9:19, 22). Thus far, al-Waṭwāt’s description matches the Biblical narrative. However, he does not mention the scroll reading (*qer’at megillah*), the giving of alms (*mattanōt la-’ebiōnīm*), and the feasting (*mishteh*) that are obligatory on this day according to the Rabbinic teachings (see Mishnah *Megillah* 1:4; JT *Megillah* 6b; [1:4]; BT *Megillah* 7a; JT *Sheqalīm* 1a [1:1]). Finally, al-Waṭwāt writes that the Jews produce an effigy (*ṣūra*) of Haman, fill its belly with dates, and then burn it (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218). He may have learned about this from al-Bīrūnī who describes a similar act (al-Bīrūnī 1878, pp. 280–281). Notably, such a custom was known in earlier periods and in various Jewish communities.¹²

Hanukkah: Al-Waṭwāt calls this festival *al-ḥanukka* and says that it, too, is something that the Jews innovated. It lasts eight days. On the first night the Jews (probably referring to the Rabbanites, since the Karaites do not acknowledge Hanukkah) light one candle (*sirājī*) at the gates of their houses and so on until they light eight on the eighth night (al-Waṭwāt 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218).

¹⁰ Some Karaite sources claim that the fast of Esther is not obligatory. See Bashyachi (1966, p. 157).

¹¹ On al-Maqrīzī’s life and work and his account of Jewish festivals, see Rosenthal (1991); Rabbat (2003); Bauden (2010; 2013; 2014); Mazuz (2019a).

¹² See further, Holder (1986, p. 195).

Hanukkah, he says, is celebrated because one of the *jabābira* took over the Temple, killed those who were there, and invoked the *ius primae noctis* privilege. The sons of the priest attacked him and the youngest of them killed him. They searched for oil for the Temple, but found only a small quantity. They divided it commensurate with the number of candles that they light every night at the doorways of their houses during the eight nights and established them as days of festival and called it Hanukkah. This word [*al-ḥanukka*] is derived from the word for cleaning (*tanẓīf*), since during these days they cleaned the sanctuary [of the Temple] from the dirt of the *jabbār*'s people (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218). Al-Bīrūnī preceded al-Waṭwāṭ in using the word *tanẓīf* to explain the meaning of the word Hanukkah, but did not elaborate on it (al-Bīrūnī 1878, p. 278). Al-Waṭwāṭ's explanation is correct. *Ḥanūkkah* in Hebrew means inauguration. I Mac. 4:58 states that Judah ordered the celebration of *ḥanūkkat ha-mizbeaḥ*, the inauguration of the altar, after the Maccabees purified it of the defilement that the Greeks had inflicted on it. The word *jabābira* can be translated in several ways (Lane 1980, Vol. 2, p. 374). The most relevant in this context are heroes, tyrants, and mighty ones. Here al-Waṭwāṭ may have absorbed some terminology from the 'al *ha-nissīm* prayer, which Rabbanites recite on Hanukkah (and Purim) to thank God for His miracles and for delivering "the mighty (*gībḇōrīm*) into the hands of the weak" (e.g., *Sīddūr 'Abōdat Ha-Shem* 2008, pp. 131–132; *Sīddūr Yeḥeveh Da 'at* 1995, pp. 80–81).

Possible inspiration from Talmudic sources also exists in al-Waṭwāṭ's account of Hanukkah. The *ius primae noctis* motif appears in several sources. JT *Ketūbōt* 5b (1:5) states that the Greeks "decreed that the governor first have intercourse [with newly married women]." In BT *Shabbat* 23a, R. Joshua says that women are obliged to light the Hanukkah candle because they also experienced a miracle: the Greeks ruled that every virgin bride must have intercourse with the ruler before doing so with her husband; R. Joshua added that the miracle was made by a woman.¹³ R. Joshua may have been referring to the story of Mattathias's daughter. It is more likely, however, that al-Waṭwāṭ was inspired by Midrash *Ma'aśeh Ḥanūkkah*, according to which Mattathias's daughter, Hanna, tore her clothes on her wedding day in front of the guests, prompting her brothers to wish to kill her. Observing their rage, she asked them why her act should anger them since she is going to be given to the Greek governor. She then instructed them to take an example from Jacob's sons, Simon and Levi. They took her to the governor, who thought that they had come to surrender her, and when they entered his house they killed him (Eisenstein 1915, p. 190; Jellinek 1967, Vol. 1, pp. 2–3). Notably, al-Bīrūnī cites a background story for celebrating Hanukkah that has motifs similar to those in al-Waṭwāṭ's account, but the story is different as is the reason for celebrating eight days (al-Bīrūnī 1878, p. 278).

Al-Waṭwāṭ concludes his account of Hanukkah and all the festivals in the following words: "And some of them call it *al-tabrīk*" (al-Waṭwāṭ 1990, Vol. 1, p. 218). The connection between *al-tabrīk* and Hanukkah is not clear. Al-Bīrūnī, one of al-

¹³ The claim that virgin brides had to have intercourse with the Greek governor first occurs in BT *Ketūbōt* 3b.

Waṭwāt's sources of information on Jewish festivals, also mentions a festival that is called *al-tabrīk*. He argues, however, that it falls on the twenty-second of Tishrei. The date and parts of his description of the festival (al-Bīrūnī 1878, p. 277) suggest that he refers to *Šimḥat Tōrah*. (The name *tabrīk* very likely stems from the name of the last weekly Torah reading that is central in the ritual of the *Šimḥat Tōrah* festival, *ve-Zo't ha-Berakhah*.) The presence of this observation in al-Waṭwāt's account of Hanukkah is difficult to explain and deserves further study.

Al-Waṭwāt's Influence on Ensuing Muslim Descriptions of Jewish Observances

The account under discussion (as well as other contents in al-Waṭwāt's *Mabāhij*) had an influence on later encyclopaedic treatises on the Mamluk period. Frédéric Bauden notes that although Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Nuwayrī (1272–1332 CE),¹⁴ a younger contemporary of al-Waṭwāt's, did not quote his source in the account of Jewish festivals in his *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*, it may be identified as al-Waṭwāt. He further claims that al-Maqrīzī in *al-Mawā'iz wa'l-I'tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa'l-Āthār* undoubtedly relied on al-Nuwayrī, noting as proof the phrasing and the order in which the festivals are detailed (Bauden 2006, pp. 132–133). Al-Maqrīzī discusses, *inter alia*, Jewish festivals at least three times: twice in *al-Khiṭaṭ* (al-Maqrīzī 2003, Vol. 4/2, pp. 942–948, 951–952), and once in *al-Khabar 'an al-Bashar fī Ansāb al-'Arab wa-Nasab Sayyid al-Bashar* (al-Maqrīzī, n.d.).¹⁵ When the texts are placed side-by-side, Bauden's statement regarding al-Maqrīzī's reliance on al-Nuwayrī appears better suited to al-Maqrīzī's description of the festivals in *al-Khabar* than it does to that in *al-Khiṭaṭ*.¹⁶

Both al-Nuwayrī and al-Maqrīzī elaborated on al-Waṭwāt's account. While the former added only few sentences and words (see al-Nuwayrī 1923, Vol. 1, p. 195), the latter significantly expanded this account as it pertains to *Sukkōt*, Passover, Pentecost, Purim, and Hanukkah (see Mazuz 2019a; 2019b). Another Muslim scholar who relied on al-Waṭwāt's account of Jewish festivals is Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Qalqashandī (ca. 1355–1418 CE) in his *Šubḥ al-A'shā fī Šinā'at al-Inshā'*. In fact, al-Qalqashandī copied al-Waṭwāt's entire account. Even though his wording is somewhat different in reference to a few of the festivals, the identity of his source is unmistakable (see al-Qalqashandī 1922, Vol. 2, pp. 426–429). It is evident, then, that al-Waṭwāt's description of the major Jewish festivals established a basis for inquiries that were copied and expanded in later generations by other Muslim scholars who were interested in Egyptian Jews and their religious customs.

¹⁴ On his life and work, see Chapoutot-Remadi (1995).

¹⁵ See further, Frenkel (2012, pp. 329–333); Mazuz (2019a; 2019b).

¹⁶ For additional cases in which al-Maqrīzī's words are taken from al-Nuwayrī, who relied on al-Waṭwāt, see Mazuz (2017, pp. 5, 8).

Conclusion

Three additional points in al-Waṭwāṭ's account of Jewish festivals are noteworthy: (1) His stress is on the essence of each festival. (2) He does not mention Rabbanites or Karaites. (3) The names that he uses for the festivals are noteworthy: sometimes he gives the literal translation, sometimes the name itself, and in others the Aramaic form, as appears in the Talmud. This shows either an effort by mediaeval Muslim scholars to translate the names of Jewish festivals in the closest possible manner to their Hebrew forms or to use the names that Jews in the Islamic world invoked for their festivals.

Al-Waṭwāṭ's account of Jewish festivals is a conflation of parts of the descriptions of al-Maqdisī and al-Bīrūnī along with some Jewish content.¹⁷ Al-Maqdisī's overview covers only five Jewish festivals and four fasts and appears as part of his description of the Jewish faith and customs; al-Bīrūnī, in contrast, references the full set of observances in a chapter that describes the entire Jewish calendar. The questions of why al-Waṭwāṭ took from each the parts that he took and why he describes only seven festivals remain unanswered.

Although it contains some inaccuracies and misunderstandings, al-Waṭwāṭ's account corresponds rather closely to the Rabbinic approach. As for the specific Jewish sources (textual or oral) that underlie his text, no unequivocal answer can be given. Part of his description may have been inspired by his familiarity with some aspects of Jewish life in Egypt of his time. Alternatively, given that al-Waṭwāṭ was a wealthy bookseller (hence his name: al-Kutubī, "the Bookseller"), he may have derived his knowledge about Jewish festivals from some of the many books to which he was exposed.

Despite the slightly polemical tenor of his claim that Purim and Hanukkah are innovations, his account lacks polemical purposes or tendencies. Therefore, al-Waṭwāṭ enriches our knowledge of the religious, and to some extent the spiritual, lives of the Rabbanite Jews of Egypt in the 13th and 14th centuries CE. No less important is that his remarks about the festivals serve as a basis for inquiry on the topic for later mediaeval Muslim scholars who promote this knowledge, and their reports, side-by-side with Jewish sources, give us the most complete picture of the topic that can be attained.

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¹⁷ Jewish contents are intertwined in some of al-Maqdisī's and al-Bīrūnī's writings, providing examples of Jewish materials that were recycled in Islamic literature (and then recycled again by later Muslim scholars).

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