

Intra-writer variation in the Arabic sources of the Cairo Genizah

The richness of the Cairo Genizah documentary sources allows us to track intra-writer variation in the works of various writers, sometimes over decades of their lives. In addition, some of the writers do not only compose letters and legal documents, but also literary works of various genres.

This paper will explore variation in the writing of individuals, investigating how writers adapt their style:

1) according to their intended audience;

This will include investigations of register change of Jewish as opposed to Muslim readers, male vs. female recipients, and differences in social rank.

2) according to the theme of correspondence or document;

Comparisons are made for example between genres such as mercantile and community correspondence, or between different sorts of legal documents, with a focus on comparison between religiously vs. secularly marked genres.

3) when composing documentary versus literary works;

This will track the writing of scribes such as Halfon b. Menasse, comparing idiosyncracies of their language in the different genres.

4) how individuals linguistically change over the course of their life time;

This will focus on authors such as Halfon b. Nissim, who left behind letters spanning decades, and explore how we can trace communities of writers influencing each other in their linguistic decision making.

References

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