Introduction to a Feuilleton in French

The feuilleton “Memories of Mobilization: Yom Kippur in the Ma‘arif Mellah” (Souvenirs de mobilisation Kippuor au Mellah de Haarif) was published in *La Liberté,* a newspaper published in Tangier, northern Morocco, from 1915 to 1922 by Solomon Benayoun. Benayoun printed the paper at the French-Hebrew Imprimerie Française du Maroc, which he owned. It appeared in two editions—*La Liberté* in French and *Al-Houriyya* in Judeo-Arabic—that were different in nature. In the French edition, publicistic articles on a broad range of topics, written by local Jewish intellectuals stood out, occasionally accompanied by feuilletons. In the Judeo-Arabic vehicle, few articles appeared and most of the space was devoted to reports gleaned from the world Jewish press. In its subhead, the newspaper declared itself a defender of the interests of Moroccan Jewry (*journal de défense des intérêts israélites au Maroc*), and indeed, it featured reports from the various Jewish communities in Morocco and discussions of urgent matters that perturbed them. Similarly, it carried items about the lives of Jews in Europe and Eretz Israel as well as Zionist activity in the Jewish world.

The feuilletons appeared in the French edition in their own section, “Feuilleton de LA LIBERTÉ.” The section appeared in the typical place of feuilletons in newspapers: on the second of the two pages of the paper, below the fold. The feuilleton genre that appeared in this journal, as in other newspapers in northern Africa that came out in Judea-Arabic, French, Spanish, or Italian, was imported from Europe, foremost from France. The French-language newspapers in northern Africa carried feuilletons that were common in France, such as serialized travelogues, the “feuilleton novel” (popular novels in installments), and articles of cultural nature.

The feuilleton before us belongs to the serialized travelogue genre and was published in *La Liberté* in four installments. The part presented here is the first part, which appeared on September 30, 1921. The author’s name is absent, but one may infer from the content that he was Jewish, evidently French, and served with the French forces that were present in Morocco from 1912 to 1956, the period of French protectorate rule. In his feuilleton, this Jewish soldier describes the Yom Kippur eve when he and other Jewish soldiers received a furlough from military training in order to celebrate their festival. They marched off to the Jewish community nearest the military base in Ma‘arif. The soldier describes the warm reception that the community gave him: being hosted in private homes, the pre-fast meal, and the Yom Kippur evening prayers. He describes the synagogue and, as he does so, elaborates on relations between the wealthy and the poor and the young and the old. I presume that this series of feuilletons had appeared in a Jewish newspaper in France and that Benayoun, the editor of *La Liberté*, found it of interest due to its account of Yom Kippur in Morocco and therefore published it in his newspaper. Notably, the European Jewish soldier’s account is free of any Orientalist perspective; he describes the encounter with his fellow Jews in a tenor of intimacy, sympathy, and appreciation.

**Further reading:**

Pierre Cohen, *La presse juive marocaine éditée au Maroc, 1870–1963*, Rabat 2007.

Introduction to a Feuilleton in Judeo-Arabic

The feuilleton “Qasida of an Epidemic of Typhoid Fever” was published on a single folio, evidently in Casablanca and by all appearances in the 1940s. Its anonymous author signed his name with the initials *ayin-bet* *dalet-bet*. Written in the form of a *qasida,* a poetic genre originating in the pre-Islamic era in the Arabian Peninsula, it describes an epidemic of typhoid fever that was spreading in Morocco. The writer describes the doctors’ astonishment in the face of the epidemic and reports the plight of those seriously ill in hospital. He urges his readers to maintain hygiene, to lock down in place, and to accept inoculation in order to fend off the illness. At the end, he pleads with God to have mercy on the community so that the plague will disappear and the ill will recover.

The feuilleton “Qasida of an Epidemic of Typhoid Fever” is a single folio, one of hundreds of similar leaves that were published at this time in Morocco. These were not the feuilletons that appeared in the Judeo-Arabic press but rather individual sheets of paper that writers produced, printed, and published on their own. This phenomenon is not unique to Morocco; it has parallels in Jewish communities in northern Africa at that time. Loose folios were also common in Jewish communities in Europe, but there the phenomenon waned as the Jewish press evolved.

I propose that these stand-alone folio publications be attributed the feuilleton genre because their characteristics, in my opinion, overlap those of feuilletons. The word *feuilleton* in French means “leaf” or “folio” because the first feuilletons were printed on a separate page attached to the newspaper; only later did they appear inside the newspaper, and even then in a separate section. The stand-alone folios were produced by artists who brought them to press and distributed them independently and in bookstores. In the first half of the twentieth century, most newspapers [Jewish newspapers?] in Morocco were published in French; few appeared in Judeo-Arabic due to difficulties that the colonial authorities placed in their path. One may regard the individual folios as manifestations of resistance and of a cultural product that circumvented the government’s oversight. Fear of the authorities prompted some writers to publish their works anonymously or to identify themselves by initials only.

The folios addressed themselves to the public at large, comprised of readers who were fluent in Judeo-Arabic. Since few of them read that language, the folios were not only read by individuals but also read aloud to groups of listeners. The language used was spoken Judeo-Arabic rendered in Arabic characters and not literary Arabic, in which the Jews of the Maghreb were not proficient. Until these single folios were printed, such texts were composed and preserved as part of an oral culture or within a culture of manuscripts that were now widely printed and distributed for the first time.

All the works were written in a maqam form that presents diverse poetic-literary works in a combination of rhymed prose with rhetorical flair and metered poetry. The singular style of the poetic works that were published on these single folios is unsurprising because the predominant literary endeavor in northern Africa, among Muslims and Jews, was poetry in all of its forms. This poetry, passed on by oral tradition, was placed in writing now that printing had become available in Morocco.

The contents of the folios are highly diverse. In some, the writers express an opinion about current affairs or use the literary genre as an instrument of direct or satirical criticism. Some works recount a fictional tale and others a historical event. Some of the works resemble a lamentation or eulogy, describing someone who has died. The contents deal in part with issues of modern society. In the feuilleton presented here, as stated, the writer describes an epidemic of typhoid fever in Morocco.

**Further reading:**

Yosef Tobi and Tsivia Tobi, *Judeo-Arabic Literature in Tunisia, 1850-1950* (Detroit, 2014)