

Jewish Physicians in the Service of Muslim Patrons: Dūnash Ibn Tamīm's Scholarly Career at the Fatimid Court in Kairouan

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Abstract

The Fatimid court in Kairouan gives us prominent examples for studying Jewish-Islamic intellectual relations. For example, Isaac Israeli, a Jewish medical scholar, was employed by the founder of the Fatimid dynasty, ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Mahdī, as a court physician, and he composed several medical works for Muslim patrons, but he did not quit his religion as suggested by the fact that he composed a commentary on *Sefer Yezira* (“Book on Creation”), a Hebrew esoteric book on cosmogony. Thus, Isaac Israeli’s career at the court is quite interesting when we focus on Jewish-Muslim scholarly interaction; however, since his commentary on the *Sefer Yezira* is not extant, we do not have enough documents showing Isaac’s role in the interaction. Fortunately, another similar example from the Fatimid court provides more evidence: that of Dūnash ibn Tamīm, a Jewish court physician. He was a disciple of Isaac Israeli, and his two astronomical works written for Muslim patrons, namely *Liber de Orbe* (formerly misattributed to Māshā’allāh) and *Treatise on the Armillary Sphere*, as well as his commentary on *Sefer Yezira* are extant. In this paper, I will overview the three works of him and elucidate his scholarly career at the court, which in turn will reveal how a Jewish scholar survived at an Islamic court while keeping his religion.