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The Tale of the Yellow Folio from Kalīla and Dimna**

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Media in Flux

The Tale of the Yellow Folio from *Kalīla and Dimna*

Beatrice Gruendler

In the preface added by the translator–adaptor Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 157/756) to his (lost) Arabic version of the manual of statecraft packaged as parables, *Kalīla and Dimna*, much is said about reading books, interpreting parables, applying knowledge in life, and being an exemplary scholar.¹As the full text of this work only resurfaces from the mists of history half a millennium later in the 13th century as a kaleidoscope of versions, we may never know the exact words he wrote. The text has become fluid, and over the centuries, copyist–redactors have added their overtones.²However, some of the embedded tales appear in all extant manuscripts. These, as the rest of the text, have diverged in their formulation, but as elements, they can be assumed to have existed since Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ’s time.

In the Arabic preface, the sub–stories are well–fitted to the purpose they serve. This differs from sub–stories in later chapters, some of which become more complex and develop a dynamic of their own beyond the purpose they supposedly serve. In the Arabic preface, each sub–story belongs to a larger topic and is often introduced by a saying or analogy which the story then exemplifies. The topics are not clearly separated but rather merge into each other, with some items from one topic appearing elsewhere. General sayings on culture, life, or virtue and analogical images are interspersed at many places.

The first topic is about knowledge acquired by reading books, and particularly this book, which is to be done thoroughly and conscientiously. The meaning of the parables is to be decoded with awareness of their outward and hidden meanings. Here appears the sub–story of the bequeathed treasure, which exemplifies things memorized when young and understood upon adulthood. Another sub–story (absent in Q–c)⁴concerns a man who loses a treasure he found by having it carried home by others who keep it for themselves. The reason for his loss is that he failed to reflect on the consequences of his actions. The third sub–story is about a man who mistakes reciting a text about grammar or rhetoric for knowing its contents (to be discussed in detail).

The second topic concerns the application of acquired knowledge in life. One sub–story tells of a man who is aware of a burglar in his house but falls asleep while the burglar robs everything, because the man failed to use his knowledge. Another sub–story compares a blind and a sighted man both of whom fall into a ditch, but the sighted one is to be blamed, for he should have been aware.

¹ The *Kalīla and Dimna* — *AnonymClassic* project has received funding from the European Research Council, under the European Union’s H2020–EU.1.1. — EXCELLENT SCIENCE program, Advanced Grant no. 742635. See the project website: <https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/en/e/kalila-wa-dimna/>. I thank Ulrich Marzolph, the members of the *AnonymClassic* team, and the editors of the present volume for their feedback on an earlier draft of this article.

For an overview on *Kalīla wa–Dimna* and its textual history, see Gruendler et al., An interim report; Gruendler, *Les versions arabes*; de Blois, *Burzōy’s voyage*; Grotzfeld et al., *Kalila und Dimna*; and Brockelmann, *Kalīla wa–Dimna*. On Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and his entire written oeuvre, see Kristó–Nagy, *La pensée d’Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ*.

² On silent co–authorship in *Kalīla wa–Dimna*, see Gruendler, A rat and its redactors.

⁴ These labels and the manuscript groups they refer to are explained in section 2.

The third topic concerns how a scholar is to conduct himself, namely virtuously, without excessive ambition or harming others. This is illustrated by the merchant and his fraudulent partner who ends up stealing his own merchandise (placed under this topic in L-c). Another sub-story tells of a naked pauper (not in Q-c), who scares away a thief who is about to rob his last bit of food and who escapes leaving his garb behind. This makes the pauper gain from the failed theft. The tale is told however to explain that one must not rely on such rare luck but instead strive toward the good like most people.

The fourth topic, that one must learn from others' experience but must check any received information, is not illustrated by any story.

Then follows a reprise of the first topic, and the preface ends here in the one group of versions (L-c). Another group (P-c) places the sub-story of the merchant and his fraudulent partner here and follows it up with three further tales. The story of the thief and the two jars holds up a mirror to the fraudulent partner with another thief who errs in stealing grain rather than gold as he intended. The next tale has a fisher find a shell that turns out empty. Being quickly discouraged, he forgoes a second chance, and another fisher retrieves from the waters another shell that contains a pearl. His failure is lack of perseverance. Finally, a tale of three brothers (not in Q-c) describes how a younger brother reforms his two elder spendthrift siblings by sharing his part of the inheritance with them and guiding them to proper behavior and responsible management of their wealth.

1. The Sub-Story of "The Yellow Folio"

The sub-story of the misguided reader speaks precisely to the topic of the preface, namely about using the written medium in order to acquire knowledge. It is the tale of "The Yellow Folio," and it describes the error of a man who reads something without knowing or understanding the contents. It is titled after an inscribed sheet the man receives (*al-ṣaḥifatu l-ṣafrā*). The colour may refer to yellowing from age but plays no particular role in the story. As is usually the case with embedded tales, the present one is meant to reinforce a point in the argument. It is placed among short wisdom sayings on proper reading, an exhortation on how to extract knowledge, an image, and a further exhortation to seek knowledge, forming together a coherent block.

The tale proper ensues after two general statements about reading, the first that one should read slowly and carefully in order to properly understand the text (16.1 *ImReaderToGrasp AndReflect*), and the second, that the reader of a book must contemplate both its overt and hidden meanings to draw any benefit from it (16.2 *ImSuperficialReadingFruitless*).⁵ The statements are followed by the short analogy of a nut (17): one can get to the edible contents only by cracking the shell (P-c and L-c) and extracting these (only L-c). The sub-story then follows to illustrate more specifically what "cracking the nut" entails in the process of reading. After the tale, an exhortation to seek knowledge resumes the larger topic (20.1; see the synopsis on which units appear in which versions, Appendix 2).

The sub-story itself gives a counter example to "cracking the nut": it tells of a man who gets it all wrong and confuses owning a piece of writing and reciting its contents with penetrating the subject of what was written down. Beyond these basic facts, the versions contained in the manuscripts diverge. Ibn al-Muqaffa's rendition has been overwritten, and

⁵ The serial numbers and labels refer to the segments into which the preface has been subdivided for alignment of corresponding passages in the digitized versions. For the full text of the present sub-story, see the Appendix 4 and 5.

the different ways of the man's failure as they are described can only be attributed to the copyist-redactors between the thirteenth and the nineteenth century, whose versions survive. Their various renditions will be compared in the following.

These no longer reflect the context of the Arabic adaptation, the time of the introduction of the book codex to Arabic-Islamic culture, when *Kalīla and Dimna* was one of the first books with prefaces and chapters, translated in the mid-second/eighth century from the Middle Persian version, itself combining elements from Sanskrit works. With its sophisticated structure, including multiple intercalated narrative frames, it stood out among the formats used for early Arabic books.⁶The preface under discussion originates from the Arabic adaptation, as do several other chapters of the book. *Kalīla and Dimna* is a book which reflects about its own medium. What does reading mean? Which ways of reading exist? And which purpose do they serve? The sub-story to be discussed heightens this self-reflexivity through inversion, dramatizing a failed performance of reading. Other prefaces (*Kalīla and Dimna* contains no less than four) speak on the topic of books too, but from different angles, such as on medical books as a scholarly reference (Bu), and on *Kalīla and Dimna* in specific as a source of rulers' knowledge (Sv, Lv) or memorialization (Az) and a treasured object (Sv, Lv), on the motive and process of its composition (Az), its importation to Persia (Sv, Lv, Bu), and its translation (Lv). But the Arabic preface focuses in particular on what one is to do with this book and how best to draw benefit from it. The tale of the Yellow Folio comes to stand in as a cameo of sorts for the usage of books, which forms a prominent topic of the Arabic preface. But the exact wording of what Ibn al-Muqaffa' wrote as a contemporary to the adoption of this medium into Arabic-Islamic culture is no longer retrievable. The book's surviving versions reflect a much later era. Meanwhile, the work had shifted from a model of secretarial prose to an "everyman's handbook" on practical ethics and popular philosophy. In this later period, the book as medium was no longer new, but the novelty was its widening use by individuals who were not scholars or members of the elite and nonetheless owned, read, and wrote books.⁷

Before delving into the tale, a short overview of the manuscripts' versions and how they relate to each other is in order. One can distinguish five different types, each of which plays a different role in the textual transmission. A majority of the manuscripts forms part of a continuum, that is, a group of versions among which much text is shared, but each witness differs from the other in an incremental way with a tendency towards accretion over time, but also with cuts and substitutions. Three continua have been identified, referred to as the Paris continuum, the London continuum, and the Queen continuum.⁸Outside of these falls several early manuscripts from the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth century, which differ in a number of ways from the continua and from each other (group E). In a further type of versions, elements from all the previous are selectively combined; these are the so-called *cross-copied* versions.⁹Finally, few manuscripts are actually near-verbatim copies of others. It turns out that copyists of *Kalīla and Dimna* did not often "copy", and are therefore referred hereafter as copyist-redactors.

⁶On early Arabic book formats in general, see Gruendler, *The rise of the Arabic book*, 27–29, and on *Kalīla and Dimna*, *ibid.*, 155–61.

⁷For the increased readership in the middle period, see Hirschler, *The written word*, and for readership and authorship in the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries, see Hanna, *In praise of books*, Sajdi, *The barber of Damascus*, and Diyāb, *The book of travels*.

⁸For a detailed discussion of this concept, its applicability and limitations, see Gruendler, *The relation among manuscripts*.

⁹The term was coined by Jean Dagenais, with reference to Old Castilian, see his *Ethics of reading*, 132.

As it may have become clear at this point, reading *Kalīla and Dimna* is not a linear process. Rather one cannot look at one version without being aware of the rendition of the same passage in a number of others. For the present purpose, a synoptic edition has been composed of fifteen witnesses. Numerically speaking, these represent only ten percent of the work's ca. 140 extant manuscripts, but they have been selected in such a way as to represent a maximal variance across the first four of the above-described types (near-verbatim copies are excluded, as they do not contribute to the present analysis). Reading "parallel" across fifteen witnesses, as it were, is an unusual experience, and today, the juxtaposition of versions is a more common technique in film-making than in literature. The reader of early Arabic prose, however, is often presented with the number of versions of the same event in succession, be that in Prophetic *ḥadīth* or historical or literary accounts (*akhbār*). But these mostly short texts differ from a book like *Kalīla and Dimna* not only in length but also by the fact that, in *ḥadīth* and *akhbār*, transmission began orally and was then committed to writing, within a continued mixed written-oral tradition that lasted (at least) for the first four centuries of Arabic and Islamic culture. Conversely, *Kalīla and Dimna* began as a written work and changed through rewriting, without any sort of accompanying oral control of the transmission that would have reigned in the textual proliferation, and by the thirteenth century it had changed from a classic of *adab* to a popular book on ethics and practical philosophy. Thus the above given plot plays out in a number of versions, each penned at a different time and place, and the copyist-redactors are mostly anonymous or obscure. As it is, the modular structure of the book, subdivided into enframed tales and interspersed with self-contained sayings and analogical images, facilitates the kind of parallel reading required for comparison, as the text presents numerous points of junction that can easily be found in another version. In many manuscripts, the text is subdivided accordingly with paragraph symbols, rubrication, or overstrikes (which often coincide with the borders of segments in the present analysis). This clear articulation of the work's different elements was probably an aid and incentive for the premodern cross-copyists who had several *Vorlagen* in front of them to create their own combined versions.

2. The Versions of the Sub-Story Compared

The story analysed hereafter evolves in four phases (numbered 19.1–19.4). A man wants to acquire *faṣāḥa*, asks a scholar and friend of his for help, and receives what he desired in the form of an inscribed folio (19.1). He returns home and practices reading it (19.2). In a gathering he then speaks up, but one of those present opines that he made a mistake. The man disagrees, defending himself with owning the folio, which he keeps at his house (19.3). An appended comment declares that the man's insistence made his ignorance even more blatant (19.4). The tale is followed by the general saying that one is liable to seek knowledge (20.1).

The witnesses differ in length and wording in each phase. I will first contrast two larger groups, the Paris continuum and the London continuum (hereafter P-c and L-c; the Queen continuum, Q-c, aligns in this chapter with P-c), then discuss the early group and the cross-copied versions, and finally touch upon a few witnesses that show substantial individual rewriting.¹⁰

¹⁰ For a list of the manuscripts and their abbreviations, see Appendix. Regarding Q-c, though it first aligns with P-c and then switches to L-c, it retains a number of its own characteristics, for which see Khalfallah, What the chapter of "The King and His Dreams" reveals.

Continua

(19.1) The narrative bifurcates from the beginning between the two continua. In L-c, the man's goal is to acquire "some knowledge of *fasāḥa*" (*shay'an min 'ilm al-fasāḥa*). He brings a folio with him and asks a friend and scholar to fill it with writing about the discipline (*'ilm*), or basics (*aṣḥ*), of the *'arabiyya*. The term refers to the written form of Arabic that had been codified since the second/eighth century, as opposed to urban Arabic colloquials. *Fasāḥa* has two nuances, articulateness, in the sense of correct and clear expression, and eloquence, i.e., artful expression. Here the former meaning of correctness is implied.¹¹

In P-c, the man communicates his need without bringing along any writing material, and it is the friend who chooses to impart his knowledge using a folio on which he sketches out (*rasama*) eloquent speech. This version paraphrases *fasāḥa* as belonging to people's speech (*faṣīḥ al-kalām, min kalām al-nās*) with its varieties (*taṣārif*) and facets (*wujūh*).¹² Not correctness but eloquence is the kind of knowledge desired here. In some later witnesses, the term *wujūh* is reread as *jawhar* "substance" (Riyadh 2407, P3473).¹³ This is a reinterpretation of the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*), here by separating and reanalyzing the first radical as the conjunction *wa-* and adding a *rā'* at the end. Such free rereading of the *rasm* occurs frequently in *Kalīla and Dimna* with more or less logical, or creative, results. The present rereading generally fits, though what the "essence of eloquence" precisely refers to is uncertain.

To compare: L-c is about the correct usage of Arabic as codified, whereas the P-c aims at rhetorical elegance. The man in L-c is more modest, he simply desires a piece (*shay'an*), and he wants to have it in written form and not acquire it, as would have been the way in the second/eighth century by reading out a text with a scholar (*samā'*) in many sessions, resulting in a written copy afterwards, whose reading has been commented and corrected. The imparting of written knowledge in scholarship (*munāwala*) exists but ranks lower than oral transmission, because personal interaction with a scholar conveyed authority, and moreover the Arabic script does not regularly record the full pronunciation of each word. This might be done by adding all vowel signs, but their use was rare and at the discretion of the writer, even though in early lexical texts vocalization does appear. The way in which the request is uttered in the story characterizes an amateur who is not interested in truly becoming versed in the linguistic sciences. In the next part (19.2), he will then reuse this knowledge as if he had learned it orally, so he is not really aware of how to deal with the written medium.

(19.2) When the man has returned home to internalize the knowledge from the sheet, he does so in L-c by treating it like the transcript of something heard; he reads it without realizing that he does not know the meaning (*yaqra'uhū wa-lā yadrī ma'nāhu*).¹⁴ The verb

¹¹. For the synoptic digital edition that has facilitated this analysis, LERA, see the home page: <https://lera.uzi.uni-halle.de/>. See also Schütz and Pöckelmann, LERA. On its adaptation to Arabic, see the contribution of Mahmoud Kozae and Marwa M. Ahmed in Gruendler et al., An interim report 272–6. The cross-analysis tool has been created by Mahmoud Kozae, and the graphs of the present analysis are included in the Appendix.

¹². The non-technical meaning is intended by the plural here, as opposed to the grammatical meaning of the singular *taṣrif*, "conjugation, declension." But for the latter meaning, see BnT 2281 below.

¹³. Together with Berlin We II 672, these manuscripts form the Wetzstein subgroup (We) of P-c.

¹⁴. The transcription with full case endings is historically debatable, since many versions exhibit moderate forms of Middle Arabic, i.e. relaxed grammar but few pseudo-corrections and little or no dialectal features (on the former phenomenon, see Blau, *On pseudo-*

qara'a may variously mean to read silently or aloud or to recite by heart; the context implies that he is reading it out aloud. His error is to see reading and knowing as coinciding, which leads him to think that mere reading conveys mastery of the contents (*ẓanna annahū bi-l-qirā'ati qad aḥkama mā fihī*). He is aware of knowledge to be gained, so his focus is epistemic, but he is mistaken about how to get there.

In P-c, the man's misplaced effort is emphasized. He rehearses reading out the folio aloud (*ja'ala yukthiru min qirā'atihī*) but does not spend any time trying to grasp its contents (*walā yaqifu 'alā ma'ānīhī*). This continuum then adds the man's eagerness to display his knowledge and he joins a gathering of scholars and literati (*ahl al-adab wa-l-'ilm*). His error consists in not bothering with the content at all and thinking that reading itself constitutes knowledge (*ẓanna annahū ktafā bimā qara'ahū*). His focus is performative, he wants to show other people what he has learned, and those to whom he wants to display his knowledge are also people of *adab* (a multifaceted concept that one may summarize as "applied culture," as it is selective knowledge prepared for display as opposed to in-depth scholarship).

(19.3) In L-c, the man then applies in speech (*takallama*) what he thinks he knows but commits a linguistic mistake (*lahanta/alhanta*).¹⁵ This is pointed out to him by another person. The fact that this occurs in a gathering of scholars is only given as an aside in L-c (*ahl al-'ilm wa-l-faṣāḥa*); literati (*ahl al-adab*) are not included. The focus is the man's linguistic error, *lahn*, a technical term and a topic that was treated since the second/eighth century in numerous treatises on the rectification of speech. His incredulous counter-question repeats the same term, "Did I commit/Am I accused of a language error?" (*alḥanu/ulahḥanu*), implying this cannot be since he owns a folio containing the rules of the *'arabiyya*. In L-c this ends the sub-story. The man's foolish question is enough to show his confusion between reading and knowing.

In P-c the encounter is formulated as a dialogue (*muḥāwaratuhum*), and the error is remarked upon in a non-technical way (*akhta'ta*) but specified to be one of pronunciation (*fīmā naṭaqtā*) in some versions (We group). In his retort the man adds that he not only keeps the folio at home but has also read it, continuing his misunderstood equation of reading and knowing. P-c adds to the public embarrassment by having the interlocutor correct the man, "The correct way is different from what you said/pronounced" (*al-wajhu ghayru mā takallamta/naṭaqtā*).

(19.4) Only in P-c, the events of the sub-story receive a commentary, namely that the man's offering of a defense rather than silently conceding his (obvious) mistake makes his ignorance (*jahl*) and his lack of *adab* even more blatant.

(20.1) In L-c (here only A4095 and L4044) the resuming text brings the sub-story back to the general argument, stressing that what is called for is the opposite of what the man in the story attempted, namely to seek knowledge (*fa-l-mar'u ḥaqīqun an yaṭluba l-'ilm*), for which books are a means that must be used in the way proper to it. L-c makes most clear that written text is an instrument of knowledge and not a means for oral performance.

corrections, 11–22, for a definition, and 56–109, for a list of Arabic examples). The pronunciation of what is written cannot be completely restored due to the nature of the Arabic *abjad*-alphabet. For practical purposes, a classical Arabic phonetic transcription has been chosen, except for such cases when a Middle Arabic feature clearly appears in the *rasm*, which is then rendered accordingly.

¹⁵ The IV. verbal stem is not attested in this meaning in classical Arabic, but the substitution of the IV. for the I. stem is frequent in Middle Arabic; this register is used to various degrees in many manuscript versions of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. For a list of Middle Arabic features, see Fudge, *A hundred and one nights*, Introduction, xxxvi–vii.

Early Group

(19.1–19. 4) The versions of the sub-story in the early group align partially with P-c (I344, Pococke 400), whereas P3475¹⁶ remains close to the L-c with minor differences and an addition in the resuming statement (20.1). In (19.1) the former two versions define the topic of the man's ignorance as "the definitions of speech" *ḥudūd al-kalām*. This term, less technical in appearance, denotes nonetheless correct speech and appears in a number of book titles since the third/ninth century, simply as *al-Ḥudūd* or *Ḥudūd al-naḥw*. It is possible that the phrase *ḥudūd al-kalām* was at the root of the bifurcation between the continua, with L-c elaborating the component of *ḥudūd* into *aṣl/ʿilm al-ʿarabiyya* with the focus on grammar, whereas P-c developed the component of *kalām* into eloquence (*faṣīḥ al-kalām*), with the focus on rhetorics.

(19.2) In the second segment I344 and Pococke 400 share phrases that appear in neither continuum, namely the man's lack of interpreting the folio's written content (*taʿwil mā fīh*), which is more precise than not grasping (*lā yaqifu ʿalā*, P-c) or not knowing (*lā yadrī*, L-c) the content. The man's complete ignorance is then contrasted in syntactic parallelism with his perfect recitation (*māhīran bi-qirāʾatihī jāhīlan bi-taʿwīlihī*). His hubris is also accentuated; not only does he think mere memorization suffices (*iktafā*, P-c) or equates mastery (*aḥkama*, L-c), but he assumes himself to have risen to the level of true scholars and to be their match (*aḥl al-ʿilm . . . wa-ḡanna annahū qad kāfaʿahum fī ʿilmihim*).

(19.3) In the third segment, a member of the gathering (here no scholar) commenting on his speech and pointing the error out to him also mentions the correct way (*innamā huwa/innahū kadhā wa-kadhā*). A further addition, absent in both continua, has those present test the man, and his correct recitation of the sheet (I344 clarifies this as being recited by heart *ḥafīza*, not read off the page) with his complete disregard for the content. The phrase "He recited the contents with apparent perfection" (*qaraʿa mā fīhā ḡāhīran māhīran*) echoes the parallelism of the previous segment.

(19.4) The commenting segment includes a phrase emphasizing that the embarrassment was in public (*ʿinda l-nās*) and both versions add a further subject of his ignorance: besides *adab*, he also lacks understanding (*fahm*, I344) or knowledge (*ʿilm*, Pococke 400).

Versions with substantial rewriting

BnT 2281

Among the versions with substantial rewriting is BnT 2281. It belongs to the Paris continuum but reformulates the text freely in many passages. The sub-story is spiced with much technical vocabulary, mostly from the linguistic sciences. When approaching his friend (19.1), the man formulates his request in rhyming theological jargon, desiring "what deserves priority" on the subject (*al-ʿilm al-faṣīḥ bi-mawjib al-tarjīḥ*).¹⁷ He wants to be given this in the form of a fascicle, not just a folio (*an yuḥīfahū bi-juzʿin*) and he then details the elements as "the finer points of lexicon and inflection in speech" (*fuṣūl (sic) tatanāwalu daqāʿiqa l-lughati wa-taṣrīfa l-kalām*).

¹⁶P3475, dated 1175/1761, is a near verbatim copy of the partially damaged BRR 3566, dated to c. 663–679/1265–80, and is used for the Im chapter missing in the older *Vorlage*.

¹⁷This version tends to add rhyming phrases, as also at the end of the preface in describing the book's first goal as *fa-yudriku l-iltifāta ilā ḡāhīri fuṣūlihī bi-nawādirin kathīratin wa-fiṭānin ḡahāzīratin* (124.2).

Back at home (19.2), BnT 2281 describes the man's study of the written words as not being based upon unravelling their meanings (*akhadha fī l-dirāsati li-alfāzihā wa-lam yu'awwil 'alā ḥalli ma'ānihā*), and spells out his conviction that repetition is the key to becoming an articulate speaker (*fā-za'ama annahū nāla bi-dhālika l-tikrāri wa-ṣāra faṣīḥan*). The false self-perception is repeated in the next segment (19.3) before he joins the gathering (*fā-jāwazahum ḡannan minhu annahū 'arīf*). The final comment simply states the man's own exposure of his pathetic deficiency (*wa-zādahū dhālika hanatan wa-ntiqāṣan*), rather than his lack of *adab* as elsewhere in P-c.

This version's rewriting has sharpened the contrast between delusion and fact: the man's own usage of scholarly jargon and the narrative's linguistic details make the story's outcome even more grotesque.

We II 672

Another version, We II 672, differs in its way of rewriting; rather than constant rephrasing as in BnT 2281, this copyist-redactor adds periodically entire passages to the text. He identifies himself in the colophon as Aḥmad al-Rabbāṭ (d. 1830).¹⁸ At the beginning (19.1) the man expresses the wish to learn something under the direction of his scholar friend (*yata'allamu bi-qaṣdihī*), and what the friend then gives him in writing is described in general terms as "something of the system" (*shay' (sic) mina l-niḡām*). At home (19.2) this version likewise has him repeat the written folio until he knows it by heart (*ja'ala yukarriruhā ... ilā an ḥafīzahā*).

The comment (19.4) receives a long addition further explaining the man's failure by his lack of awareness of his shortcomings. Had he been conscious of it, he could have researched what he did not know, or asked someone who did, and thereby not only remedied his lack of knowledge but might also even have been counted among the scholars or literati.

There is some irony in the fact that the most creative versions, while narrating a failure in the usage of the Arabic language, do not use the accusative (*rasama lahū ... fuṣul*, BnT 2281; *kataba lahū ... shay'*, We II 672) in keeping with the Middle Arabic idiom. In We II 672 the amount and degrees of such features is higher, including pseudo-corrections and colloquial terms. It is uncertain whether the redactor of We II 672, a known bibliophile, amateur scholar, composer, and author of several works, among them a *Dīwān* of popular poetry, knew the *'arabiyya*. Even if so, the Middle Arabic idiom may have been a choice, as it had become standard in many popular genres, and it dominates over classical Arabic in manuscript versions of *Kalīla and Dimna*.¹⁹ It happens that this particular story clashes with the style in which it is imparted. One hypothesis is that P-c, whose versions proliferate more and exhibit an increase of Middle Arabic features shifts the topic therefore to rhetoric (rather than grammar as in L-c). We may never know whether the effect of irony in BnT 2281 and We II 672 was intended.

Cross-copied versions P3471

¹⁸. On him and his library, see Liebrecht, *The library of Aḥmad al-Rabbāṭ*.

¹⁹. This does not apply to those manuscripts that are copied from early modern printed editions of *Kalīla and Dimna*.

To turn to the versions that combine models, P3471 remains in this narrative within P-c. In the Arabic preface, it relies mainly on P3466, but fills in certain elements from other P-c versions, as is visible here only in one phase in the first segment.²⁰

P5881

In P5881 in turn, one can observe a fine-grained interlinking of all facets of the narrative from different versions. In the first segment (19.1), portions of L-c are chosen, in the following (19.2–19.3) parts of P-c are folded into the narrative structure of L-c with the additional elements only present in the early group: *wa-nṭalaqa* (L-c) *bihā ilā manzilihī* (all versions) *wa-jaʿala yaqraʿuhā* (L-c) *wa-yadrusuhā* (E) *wa-lā yaqifu ʿalā* (P-c) *maʿnāhā* (all versions) *wa-lā yaʿrifu taʿwīla mā fihā* (E) etc., and the segment ends with a unique phrase about the man, who thought “that he equalled them in scholarship” (*wa-sawāhum fī l-maʿrifa*, 19.2). The man’s critic addresses him with “You erred and committed a solecism” (*akhtaʿta wa-laḥanta*, 19.3) combining the formulation of P-c and L-c. In the final comment (19.4), only present in P-c and the early group, their elements are again combined, and “scholarship” (*maʿrifa*, repeated from 19.1) is added only here to the things he lacks. P5881 thus merges the aspects of both continua and the early group, carefully intercalating their phrases at each step of the narrative. This skilled collage is the most rounded version of all.²¹

To summarize, common to all versions is that a piece of scholarly, or literary, writing has led to wrong assumptions and public chastisement. According to the story and the context of sayings into which it is embedded, to simply treat such writing as a transcript of oral text to be reproduced by recitation is the wrong way to go about it. Reading requires more, for it must unlock a text’s meaning. Nor does any kind of reading suffice, rather, proper reading demands conscientious effort and reflection. Writing needs to be approached in a different way from something heard and requires a second step of cogitation and comprehension to get to the content. Beyond this, the continua differ; L-c is in general shorter and speaks about scholarly knowledge, here linguistic knowledge, which is an established discipline whose terminology is deployed in the narrative (*laḥn*, *ʿarabiyya*). P-c is longer and places the event within a social context, making it more dramatic. Here the focus lies on the performance of culture (*adab*; qualified further in some versions as *ʿilm*, Pococke 400 and P5881; *fahm* 1344; *ʿaql*, P3473; or *maʿrifa*, P5881; 19.4), which in this case grandiosely fails and results in shame and embarrassment of the ignoramus.

It is not possible here to do justice to the context of each version’s genesis, as they cover too large a span of time, and much about their creators and geographic provenance is unknown. They differ in quality (and material value) between professionally produced and illustrated copies, such as Pococke 400, and plain versions made for the copyist–redactor’s personal use, such as We II 672, thus serving various social layers of readers.²²

²⁰. In other chapters of P3471, such Lv, Oc, and Mc (abbreviations by de Blois), a wider variety of models are combined.

²¹. This being said, not the full credit can be given to the copyist–redactor of P5881, as in some cases, he inspired himself with earlier cross-copied versions, such as CCCP 578, dated to the eighth/fourteenth century. The practice can indeed be documented since that century.

²². In general, the rare early manuscripts from the seventh/thirteenth to ninth/fifteenth century are luxury copies, most of them illustrated, whereas the more numerous preserved manuscripts of from eleventh/seventeenth century onward include both professionally executed and plain codices, but less valuable copies of the earlier periods may have been lost; an exception of an early plain specimen is the manuscript of Dayr al-Shīr, dated 739/1339, which was edited by Louis Cheikho.

It is not surprising, that the present story incurred such interference through rewriting, because *Kalīla and Dimna* was the kind of book with which misunderstandings could occur. Straddling the boundary between high and popular literature, it gave amateurs access to what they regarded as scholarship.²³ Being popular but overtly claiming at the same time to belong to philosophy, *Kalīla and Dimna* played a particular role in the increased readership among common people in the middle period. The insistence of the man in the story that he keeps the folio in his home (absent in E and added in L-c and P-c but not Q-c) might reflect a new kind of owner's pride among a wider audience. It is interesting to note that the sole illustration of this tale, in the early manuscript Pococke 400, the man holds the sheet in his hand while reciting it, as is the case in this version, which lacks the phrase about keeping it at home.²⁴

Due to its fluid status, *Kalīla and Dimna* represents an interactive textual tradition that makes it possible for copyist-redactors to argue out points of interest, such as the usage of books. Being not scholars in the narrow sense, they treated it freely and actualized the narrative according to their own perceptions. In particular from the eighteenth century onward, book ownership and readership as well as book-writing increased among craftspeople and professionals, even if only for their own use in the forms of diary chronicle, travelogue, and autobiography. The same era saw the evolution of the lending library, and one manuscript (London BL Add. 7413) bears circa thirty reader's notes, many more than ownership notes, which were most likely borrowers. The more invasive rewriting of two later manuscripts (BnT 2281 and We II 672) may be a reflection of this, as is also the increased self-description of *Kalīla and Dimna* as a book of philosophy (*falsafa*) — the frequency of this term grows with time — of a kind in which people who were at best amateur scholars could have a share.

²³. On the difficulty of assigning *Kalīla and Dimna* to a particular genre, see Keegan, Its meaning lies elsewhere.

²⁴. Gruendler, *Rise of the Arabic book*, 160. As to the motifs of the illustrations, the burglary tales are those mostly illustrated within the Arabic preface, as it is usually the embedded stories that receive illustrations throughout *Kalīla and Dimna*. One must concede, however, that some images contain graphic detail that is not contained in the stories to which they belong. On the illustrations and legends and their relationship to the text, see Redwan, *Illustrations in Arabic Kalīla wa-Dimna manuscripts*.

Appendix

1. List of manuscripts used in the article

Early Group

- I344 = Istanbul, Archaeological Museum, EY 344 (dated to eleventh/seventeenth century), very similar to Riyadh, King Faisal Center, MS 2536 (dated 747/1346)
Poc. 400 = Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pococke 400 (755/1354)
P3475 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 3475 (dated 1175/1761, a near verbatim copy of BRR 3566 = Rabat, Bibliothèque royale de Rabat, 3655 (dated to c. 663–679/1265–80)
CCCC 578 = Cambridge Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, 578, dated to the eighth/fourteenth century

Paris continuum (P-c)

P3465 subgroup

- P3465 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 3465 (dated to c. 616–617/1220)
P2789 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 2789 (MTM, first part dated 1008/1599–1600)
H170 = Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, cod. orient. 170 (undated)

Wetzstein subgroup (We)

- Riyadh 2407 = Riyadh, King Faisal Center, 2407 (dated 1103/1692)
P3473 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 3473 (dated 1110/1699)
We II 672 = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Wetzstein II 672 (dated 1246/1830)

Queen-continuum (Q-c) (aligns with P-c from beginning to Rd, incl. Im)

- P3466 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 3466 (before 854/1450)
BnT 2281 = Tunis, Bibliothèque nationale de Tunisie, 2281 (dated 1070/1660)
USJ 0022(2) = Beirut, Université Saint-Joseph, 0022(2) (dated 1263/1847)

London continuum (L-c)

- A4095 = Istanbul, Ayasofya, 4095 (dated 618/1221)
L8751 = London, British Library, Or. 8751 (dated 799/1369)
L4044 = London, British Library, Or. 4044 (dated to ninth/fifteenth century)
München 618 (in Mc) = München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 618 (dated 1046/1636)

Queen continuum (aligns with L-c from Oc to the end, incl. Mc)

- P3466, BnT 2281, USJ 0022(2) see above

Cross-copied versions (CC)

- P3471 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 3471 (dated 1053/1643)
P5881 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, arabe 5881 (dated 1092/1681)

2. Segments of the digital edition according to their presence in the manuscripts

Label	P-c	Q-c	L-c	E	CC
16.1 ImReaderToGraspAndReflect			x	x	P5881
16.2. ImSuperficialReadingFruitless	x		x	x	P5881
17. ImNutCrackedForBenefit	x		x	x	P5881
18 ImExtractHiddenKnowledge			x	x	P5881
19.1 ImManWithYellow	x	x	x	x	P3471/P5881
19.2 ImManMemorizes	x	x	x	x	P3471/P5881
19.3 ImManErrs	x	x	x	x	P3471/P5881
19.4 ImYellowFolioComment	x	x		x	P3471/P5881
20.1 ImOneToSeekKnowledge			x	x	

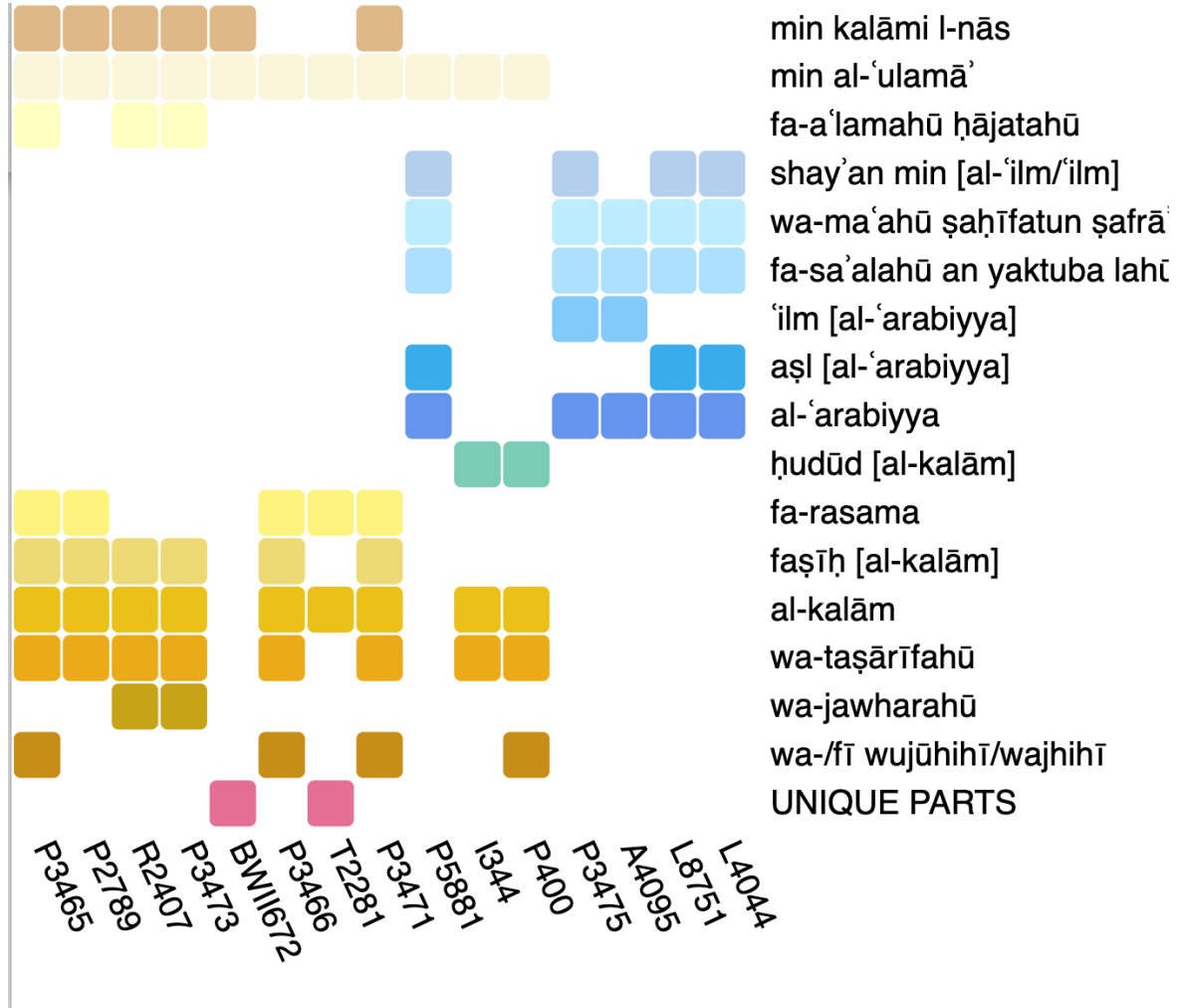
3. Graphs showing the cross-analysis of segments 19.1 - 19.4

Explanation of the graphs: manuscripts are arranged along the horizontal axis in the order of the marked up edition below, and the analysed phrases form the vertical axis. Regarding the colors, P-c is shaded in yellows, L-c in blues, E in further colors, and unique parts in magenta. The colors are identical in the marked-up edition below.

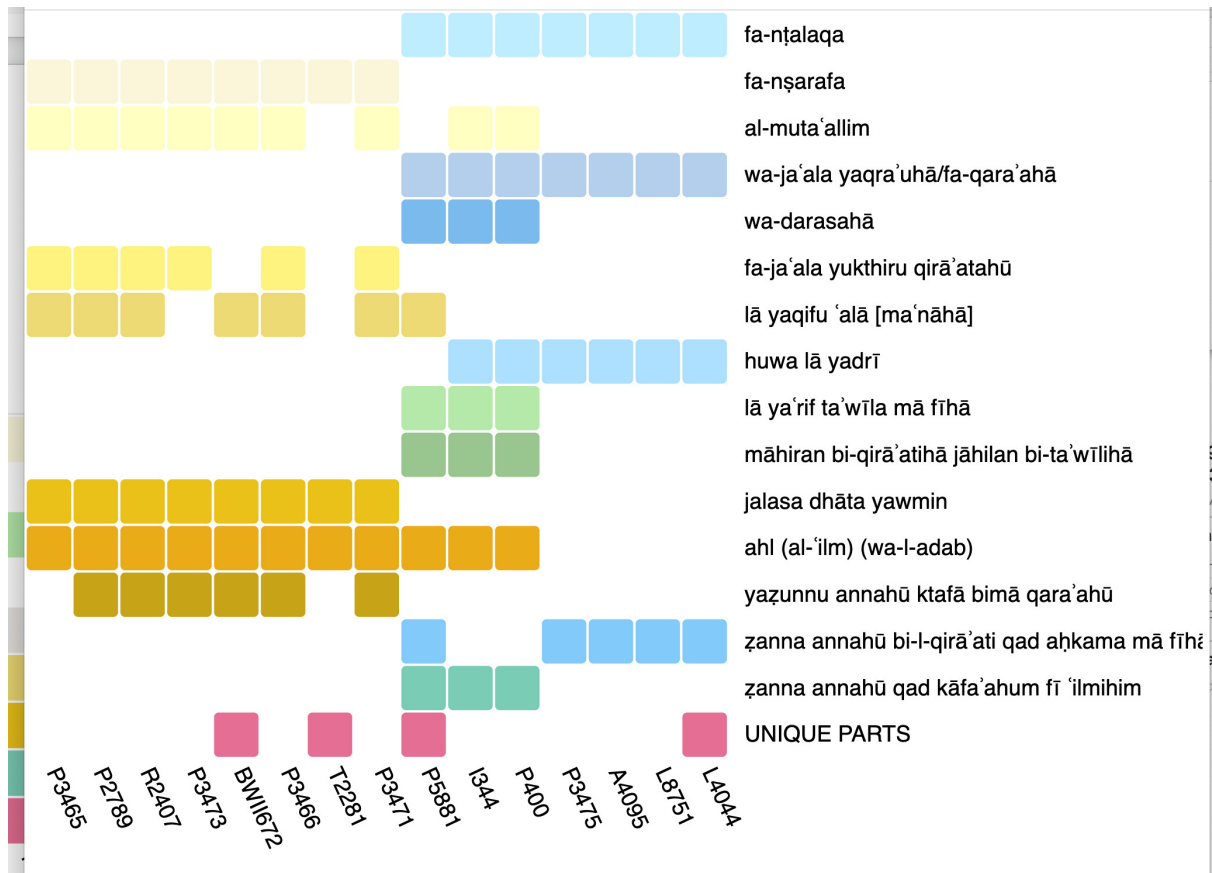
[] marks words not counted in the analysis and given for the context.

() marks words not present in all marked versions.

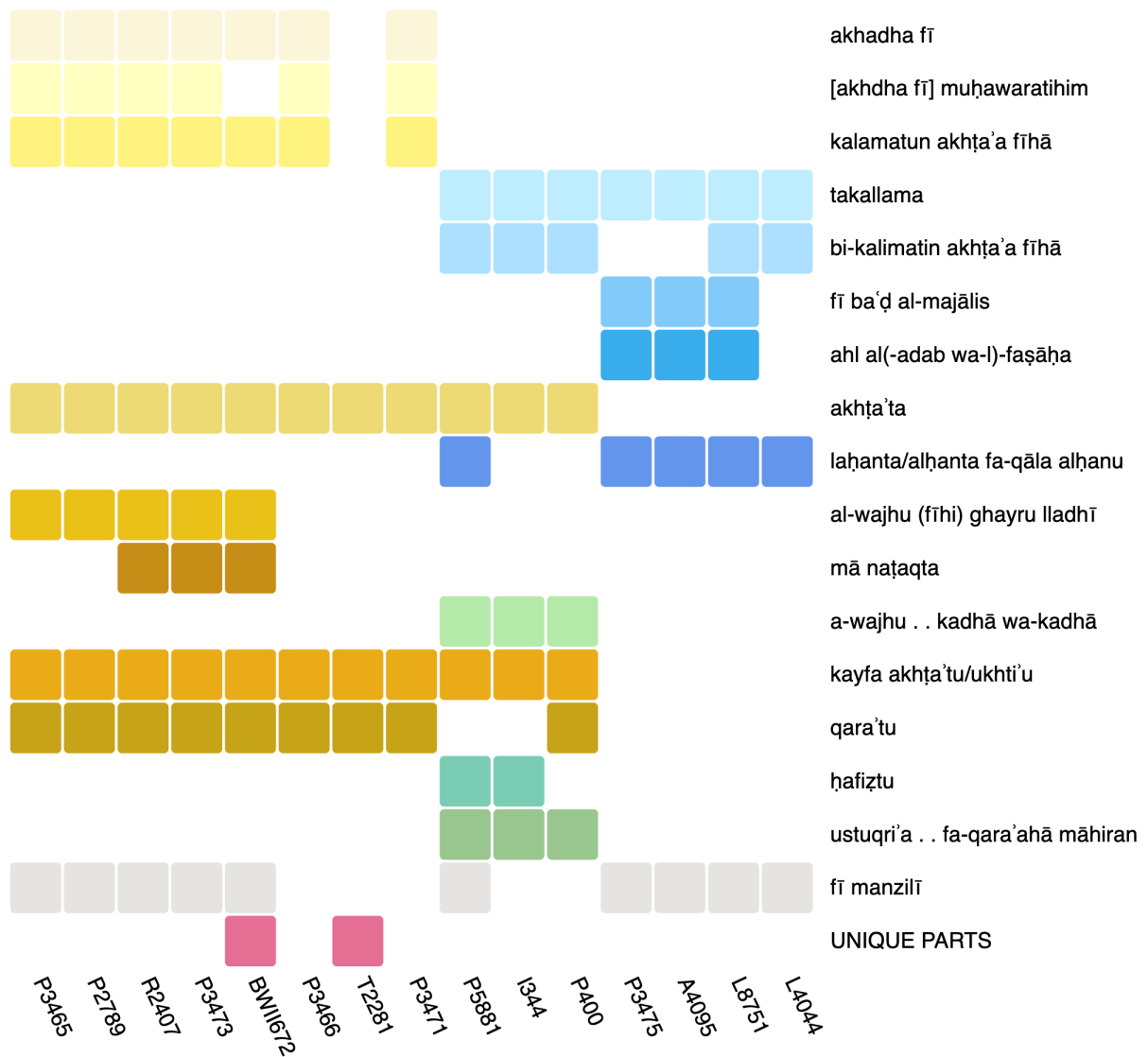
19.1 ImManWithYellowFolio



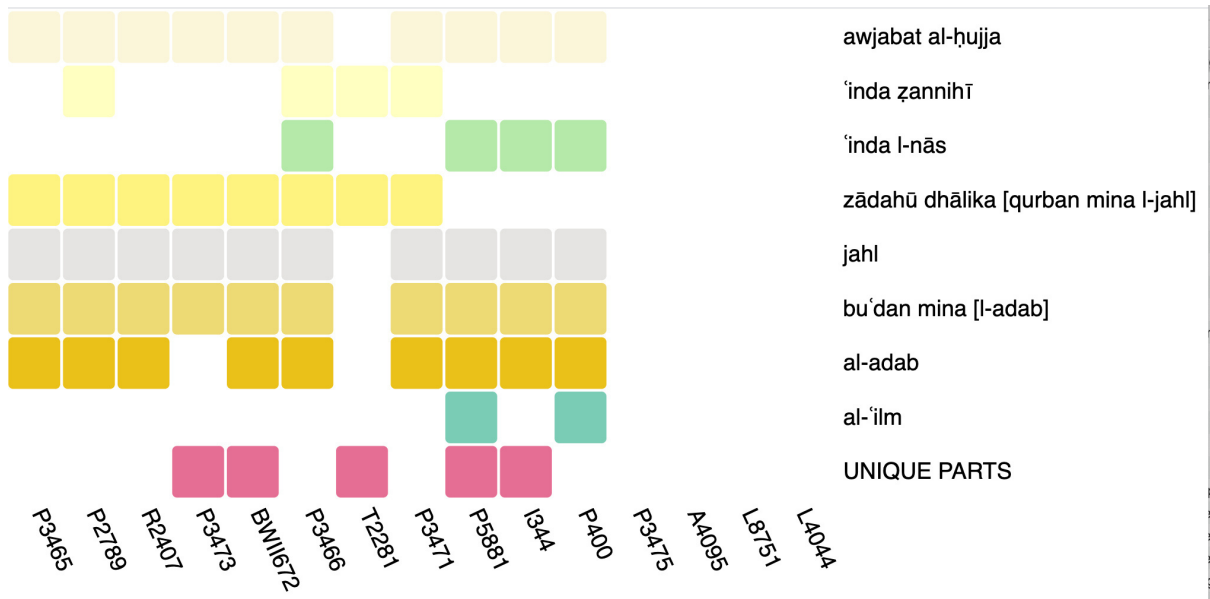
19.2 ImManMemorizes



19.3 ImManErrs



19.4 YellowFolioComment



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