

JEWISH BIBLICAL EXEGESIS
FROM ISLAMIC LANDS

SBL Press

BIBLE AND ITS RECEPTION

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JEWISH BIBLICAL EXEGESIS
FROM ISLAMIC LANDS

The Medieval Period

Edited by

Meira Polliack and Athalya Brenner-Idan

SBL Press



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The cover image shows a folio from Sa'adia Gaon's translation of and commentary on Job, held in the Cairo Genizah Collection of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies Library.

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In Memoriam
Ilana Sasson (1954–2017)
A Cherished Friend and Colleague
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------------|--|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ABD | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> |
| <i>Abr.</i> | <i>De Abrahamo</i> |
| A.J. | Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i> |
| AJSR | <i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i> |
| Arab. | Arabic |
| Avod. Zar. | Avodah Zarah |
| b. | Babylonian Talmud |
| B. Bat. | Bava Batra |
| BDB | Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1907. |
| Ber. | Berakhot |
| BibInt | Biblical Interpretation Series |
| Bik. | Bikkurim |
| BJS | Brown Judaic Studies |
| BL | British Library |
| BNP | Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris |
| BSOAS | <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> |
| <i>Dial.</i> | Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> |
| EAJS | European Association of Jewish Studies |
| EBR | Klauck, H.-J., et al., eds. <i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception</i> . Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–. |
| EI2 | Bosworth, Clifford E., et al., eds. <i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> . 2nd ed. 12 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1954–2005. |
| EJJS | <i>European Journal of Jewish Studies</i> |
| EJIW | Stillman, Norman A., eds. <i>Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World</i> . 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2010. |
| <i>EncJud</i> | Skolnik, Fred, and Michael Berenbaum, eds. <i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . 2nd ed. 22 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2007. |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Eruv. | Eruvin |
| FC | Fathers of the Church |
| fol(s). | folio(s) |
| Git. | Gittin |
| Heb. | Hebrew |
| <i>Hen</i> | <i>Henoch</i> |
| <i>HTR</i> | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i> |
| <i>IHIW</i> | <i>Intellectual History of the Islamicate World</i> |
| IMHM | Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts |
| IOS | Institute of Oriental Studies, Saint Petersburg |
| <i>IOS</i> | <i>Israel Oriental Studies</i> |
| <i>JA</i> | <i>Journal Asiatique</i> |
| <i>JAOS</i> | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> |
| <i>JBL</i> | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| <i>JCoptS</i> | <i>Journal of Coptic Studies</i> |
| <i>JIS</i> | <i>Journal of Islamic Studies</i> |
| <i>JJS</i> | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i> |
| <i>JJTP</i> | <i>Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy</i> |
| JNL | Jewish National Library |
| JPS | Jewish Publication Society (Bible translation) |
| <i>JQR</i> | <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i> |
| <i>JSAI</i> | <i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i> |
| <i>JSIJ</i> | <i>Jewish Studies Internet Journal</i> |
| JSJSup | Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |
| <i>JSQ</i> | <i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i> |
| <i>JSS</i> | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> |
| JSSSup | Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement Series |
| <i>JTS</i> | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> |
| KJV | King James Version (Authorized Version) |
| LCL | Loeb Classical Library |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| m. | Mishnah |
| MasS | Masoretic Studies |
| Meg. | Megillah |
| <i>MFOB</i> | <i>Mélanges de la faculté orientale de l'Université St. Joseph de Beyrouth</i> |
| Mid. | Middot |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| MS(S) | manuscript(s) |
| MT | Masoretic Text |
| NLR | National Library of Russia, Saint Petersburg, Firkovitch Hebrew (Евр. [= Еврейский]) and Judaeo-Arabic (Евр.-Arab. [= Еврейско-арабский]) Collections |
| NLT | New Living Translation |
| NPNF | Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace, eds. <i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . 28 vols. in 2 series. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886–1889. |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |
| NS | New Series |
| Or | <i>Orientalia (NS)</i> |
| p(p). | page(s) |
| PAAJR | <i>Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research</i> |
| Pes. Rab. | Pesikta Rabbati |
| Q | Qur'an |
| QG | <i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin</i> |
| r | recto |
| Rab. | Rabbah (preceded by biblical book name) |
| RevQ | <i>Revue de Qumran</i> |
| Rosh Hash. | Rosh Hashanah |
| RSL | Russian State Library, Moscow |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version |
| RU | Rijks Universiteitsbibliotheek, Leiden |
| Sanh. | Sanhedrin |
| Shabb. | Shabbat |
| SP IOS | Saint Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Studies |
| SP RNL | Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia |
| Ta'an | Ta'anit |
| Tanḥ. | Tanḥuma |
| v | verso |
| VT | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| WMANT | Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament |
| y. | Jerusalem Talmud |
| Yevr.-Arab. | Russian National Library, St. Petersburg, Firkovitch Judaeo-Arabic collection |
| ZAL | <i>Zeitschrift für arabische Linguistik</i> |

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Acknowledgments

We are immensely grateful to all our contributors, on whose interesting academic and personal backgrounds the reader can read more in the contributors section (pp. 343–51 below). More than half of the contributors spent a period as postdoctoral fellows or research associates in the international research project *Biblia Arabica: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, funded by the German research organization *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*. This internationally led project engaged about thirty researchers in Tel Aviv University and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich during 2012–2018. Its purpose was to uncover, chart, and describe the different Jewish and Christian schools and individuals that took part in the medieval scriptural translation enterprise of rendering the Hebrew Bible and New Testament into Arabic, including their aims and agendas and their styles and techniques. The project also studied the social and cultural implications of their innovative and ambitious endeavor, and, no less important, the Jewish and Christian dialogue with Islamic sources and reception in Islamic tradition. Scholars of the Bible in Arabic are still engaged in an attempt to organize and systemize the discussion of countless manuscripts and fragments that nowadays are found in monasteries throughout the Middle East and libraries across the globe; to analyze the different methods of translation from Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, and Coptic; and to examine the mutual influences, both religious and cultural, between the different religious communities. In doing so, they illuminate the wider historical and social repercussions of the unique interreligious discourse in the Arabic Bible versions and the ambitious endeavor of their translators.¹

1. On the many activities and publications of the *Biblia Arabica* project, among them an annotated bibliography, please consult the website www.biblia-arabica.com. With the termination of the funding period, the ongoing work is now managed by a consortium of international scholars; see therein.

The preparation and publication of this volume would not have been possible without the concentrated research period allowed many of its contributors by the generosity of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. We are hence grateful to it for granting the individual contributors the opportunity to specialize or develop their existing expertise and so to follow the direction pursued in this volume. We are proud, also, that alongside some seasoned veterans in Judeo-Arabic studies, several of the contributors are relative newcomers to the field. Around half of them finished their doctoral dissertations in recent years, while others come from established careers in biblical, Jewish, Arabic, or Islamic studies and have taken on the challenge of exploring a new terrain.

We are most grateful to the Society of Biblical Literature and to SBL Press for their continuous patience and support and their wholehearted embrace of this project and its publication. We extend special thanks to John Kutsko, Bob Buller, and Nicole Tilford.

We have striven for a text selection that would give expression to a pluralistic array of scholars. Not only do the contributors come from diverse academic trainings; they also come from diverse Jewish, Christian, and Muslim backgrounds. All of them honor and engage these materials as genuine and important expressions of Arabic literature and its wider humanistic heritage. We hope that the publication of this anthology by SBL Press will contribute to the dissemination of these texts and other such materials also among Arab and Muslim readers, who might see in it a fruitful bridge to the past and present and a common inheritance and legacy. Above all, we hope our text selection will arouse deep interest among readers from all over the world and provide a challenge to their understanding of the Hebrew Bible as well as the cultural and literary heritage of the Middle East. To repeat: the fact that medieval Jewish authors made a conscious choice to write in Arabic on their most sacred text, the Hebrew Bible, and to engage with concepts and terms deeply imbued in Islamic culture is, we think, inspiring, since it is not the obvious or most natural choice. This makes us think about the meaning of conviviality in all its intricate forms—not all of which were, or are, of course, of this creative or positive kind. The intellectual history and wider heritage of the Jews of Islamic lands is therefore interwoven with the texts chosen for this volume.

Last but not least, a luminous figure among the contributors was our dear friend and colleague Ilana Sasson (11 June 1954–15 October 2017), *Zichrona Livrakha* (may her memory be blessed). Both her parents emigrated from Baghdad to Israel, where she was born in Ḥolon. She cherished her background even after many years in the United States, where she specialized in the field and raised her family; hence she is a fitting embodiment of the long history and legacy of the Jews of Islamic lands. Perhaps it is through some inner eye that her Hebrew name designates “tree” (*ilan*) and “joy” (*sason*). A special privilege it was to have been able to discuss and receive her contribution to this volume in good time. Ilana left us too soon, as we say in Hebrew, “before her time,” yet not before having fostered, during her unique and impressive career, strong connections and a lively dialogue with many of the contributors to this volume, in kindness of heart and generosity of mind and spirit, that all of us recall. It is therefore only befitting that we dedicate this book to her memory with much love.²

Meira Polliack and Athalya Brennar-Idan
Tel Aviv, autumn 2019

2. תהי נפשה צרורה בצרור החיים = ת.נ.צ.ב.ה. (lit., “may her soul be bound up in the bond of [everlasting] life”). Readers are welcome to consult all her available articles on her academia.edu website.