JEWISH BIBLICAL EXEGESIS
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BIBLE AND ITS RECEPTION

Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, General Editor

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The Medieval Period

Edited by

Meira Polliack and Athalya Brenner-Idan

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The cover image shows a folio from Saʿadia 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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On the Former and Latter Prophets

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Abbreviations

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

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

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

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]

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.

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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

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2. ת.נ.צ.ב.ה. = תהי נפשה צרורה בצרור החיים (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.

Major Judeo-Arabic Commentators
(Ninth–Twelfth Centuries)

In the following list the reader will find some basic information, for quick general orientation, on the major medieval commentators mentioned in this volume and some others whose work we were unable to sample in the excerpts. For expansive discussions on their lives and works, as well as other figures you may come across in the contributions to this volume, please consult the recommended surveys of Judeo-Arabic literature, as well as individual entries on commentators' names, in the following reference works (most of which can nowadays be accessed electronically).

> Halkin, Abraham S. "Judaeo-Arabic Literature." *EncJud* 10:410–23.
> Stillman, Norman A. "Judeo-Arabic History and Linguistic Description." *EJIW* 3:53–58.
> Tobi, Yosef. "Literature, Judeo-Arabic." *EJIW* 3:271–78.
> Vajda, George. "Judaeo-Arabic Literature." *EI²* 4:303–7.
> Wechsler, Michael G. "Interpretation, History of: Medieval Judaism in Arabic-Speaking Lands." *EBR* 13:95–105.

Ninth–Tenth Centuries

Benjamin/Binyamin al-Nahāwandī. First half of the ninth century, Persia/Iraq. Karaite theologian and exegete. Few fragments of his biblical commentaries are extant.

Daniel al-Qūmisī/al-Kumisi. Last quarter of the ninth century and early half of the tenth century, Persia/Iraq and Jerusalem. Prominent Karaite communal leader and exegete. His major commentary on the Minor Prophets was written in Hebrew, with Judeo-Arabic glosses.

David ben Abraham/Avraham al-Fāsī. Late tenth century, Jerusalem. Major Karaite lexicographer and exegete.

Dāwūd ibn Marwān al-Muqammaṣ. Mid-ninth century, Iraq. Jewish philosopher (whether Rabbanite or Karaite is debated). Converted temporarily to Christianity.

Ḥiwi al-Balkhi. Ninth century, Balakh, Afghanistan. Sectarian Jewish philosopher, author of polemical questions on the Hebrew Bible.

Judah (ben David) Ḥayyūj (Abū Zakariyya Yahya ibn Dawūd Hayyūj). Last third of the tenth century, Fez, Morocco, and Cordoba, Spain. Influential Rabbanite linguist and biblical grammarian.

Judah ibn Quraysh. Second half of the tenth century, North Africa. Rabbanite grammarian.

Saʿadia (ben Joseph) Gaon (Saʿīd al-Fayyūmī; Heb. acronym: Rasag, Rav Saʿadia Gaon). Born in Fayum, Egypt (882), died in Baghdad (942). Spent some time in Tiberias (around 905). Appointed Head (Gaon) of the Sura Yeshiva (Jewish center of learning) in the area of Baghdad in 928. Prominent Rabbanite communal leader, philosopher, linguist, and exegete of the tenth century.

Sahl ben Matsliaḥ. Latter half of the tenth century, Jerusalem. Karaite exegete. Composed partially extant commentaries on the Pentateuch, Isaiah, and Hosea.

Salmon ben Yerūḥīm/Yerūḥam/Jeroham (Sulaym ibn Ruḥaym). Contemporary of Saʿadia, active around the middle of the tenth century, Jerusalem. Major Karaite exegete and polemicist.

Yaʿqūb/Yaakov al-Qirqisānī. First half of the tenth century, Iraq. Karaite theologian and exegete. Produced a massive compendia (summa) of Karaite history, religious praxis, and theology, known as *The Book of Lights and Watchtowers* (*Kitāb al-anwār wal-marāqib*), replete with biblical exegesis and discussions of exegetical methodology.

Yefet/Japheth ben ʿEli (Abū ʿAlī Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-Baṣrī). Died after 1004/5, Jerusalem. The most prominent Karaite translator and exegete of the tenth century. The first Jewish exegete of any persuasion to compose programmatic commentaries, as well as Judeo-Arabic translations, on every book of the Hebrew Bible, all of which are extant in manuscript.

Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ (Abū Yaʿqūb ibn Nūḥ/ibn Bakhtawayh/Bakhtawī). Latter half of the tenth century, Jerusalem. Karaite grammarian and exegete. Credited with founding a "house of study" (*dār li-l-ʿilm*) in Jerusalem,

which served as the locus of Karaite scholastic activity in the city during the tenth–eleventh centuries.

Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries

Abū al-Faraj Hārūn. Middle of the eleventh century, Jerusalem. Major Karaite grammarian and commentator of this period.

ʿAlī ben Sulaymān al-Muqaddasī. Late eleventh century, Jerusalem. Karaite exegete. Much of his literary output consisted of abridgments, adaptations, and compendiums of the works by previous Karaite exegetes of the Jerusalem school, such as his digest of Abū al-Faraj Hārūn's and Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ's commentaries on the Pentateuch, and his abridgment of Levi ben Yefet's own abridgment of al-Fāsī's lexicon of Biblical Hebrew.

Aaron (ben Joseph) ibn Sarjado. Rabbanite exegete of the early eleventh century. Known as Saʿadia's pupil and may in fact have completed Saʿadia's commentary on the Pentateuch.

David ben Boʿaz/Boaz. Second half of the eleventh century, Jerusalem. Karaite exegete and communal leader.

Isaac ibn Barūn. Died ca. 1135, Spain. Hebrew Grammarian. Rabbanite.

Isaac ibn Ghiyyāth. Second half of the eleventh century, Spain. Rabbanite philosopher, talmudic scholar, and exegete. Only his extensive commentary on Ecclesiastes has survived.

Isaac ben Samuel ha-Sefaradi (ibn al-Kanzī). First half of the twelfth century, Spain. He composed commentaries on the Former Prophets, of which only his commentary on Samuel is extant (mostly on 2 Samuel), wherein he relied much on Yefet.

Jonah ibn Janāḥ (Abū al-Walīd Marwān; Latin: Marinus). First half of the eleventh century, Cordoba and Zaragoza, Spain. The most influential Rabbanite grammarian and lexicographer of this period. Author of the magnum opus *Kitāb al-tanqīḥ*, consisting of both a comprehensive grammar of Biblical Hebrew (*Kitāb al-lumaʿ*) and a comprehensive lexicon (*Kitāb al-ʾuṣūl*).

Judah ibn Balʿam. Second half of the eleventh century, Spain. Rabbanite exegete. Composed a commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible, focusing mainly on philological issues.

Levi ben Yefet (son of Yefet ben ʻEli). Middle of the eleventh century, Jerusalem. Karaite jurist and exegete.

Moshe ben Maymon (Mūsā ibn Maymūn; Latin: Moses Maimonides). Born in Cordoba, Spain (1135 or 1138), active in Morocco and Egypt, where he died in Cairo (1204); buried in Tiberias (lower Galilee). In Hebrew works to this day he is referred to by the acronym **Rambam** ("[Our] Rabbi Moses, son of Maymon"). The most prolific and influential Rabbanite communal leader, philosopher, legal scholar, and exegete.

Moses ibn Gikatilla. Second half of the eleventh century, Cordoba and Zaragoza, Spain. Rabbanite exegete and grammarian.

Sahl ibn Faḍl (Yashar ben Ḥesed). End of the eleventh century, Jerusalem. Karaite exegete.

Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon. Rabbanite legal scholar and exegete of the early eleventh century, and Head (Gaon) of the Sura Yeshiva (Jewish center of learning) in the area of Baghdad (998–1013). He followed in the exegetical vein of Saʻadia and may in fact have completed his commentary on the Pentateuch (together with Saʻadia's other pupil Aaron [b. Joseph] ibn Sarjado).

Samuel (ibn Naghrella) ha-Nagid. First half of the eleventh century, Cordoba and Granada, Spain. Hebrew poet, talmudic commentator, and communal leader. Produced an extensive grammatical oeuvre, including a lexicon of Biblical Hebrew, of which only a few fragments are extant.

Tanchum/Tanḥum ben Joseph ha-Yerushalmi. Died 1291 in Fustat (Old Cairo). Prolific Rabbanite exegete. His work shows acquaintance with Yefet's writings.

Yeshuʻah ben Yehudah (Abū al-Faraj Furqān ibn Asad). Second half of the eleventh century, Jerusalem. The leading Karaite translator and exegete of the twelfth century. His extant works include both short and long commentaries on the Pentateuch, with Arabic translation. These reflect detailed acquaintance and thoughtful interaction with previous Karaite as well as Rabbanite exegesis, and significant influence by the Islamic Muʻtazilite school of theology.

Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (Joseph ben Abraham). Middle of the eleventh century, Jerusalem. Leading Karaite theologian and exegete.

Introduction

Meira Polliack

Since the 1990s we have been witnessing a renewed interest in medieval Bible exegesis written in the Arabic language by Jews from Islamic lands. This is especially evident in a large number of recent editions and detailed studies of their Bible translations and commentaries originally written in this language, also known as Judeo-Arabic. However, this interest is not a new phenomenon.

A Very Short History of Research

In Western Europe, the scholarly study of Jewish texts written in Arabic goes back to the early seventeenth century. At that time a growing number of Arabic manuscripts began to reach major library collections, often purchased through travels to the Middle East by scholars trained in Semitic languages, such as Oxford's first professor of Arabic, Edward Pococke (1604–1691).[1] The increasing access to Arabic texts led to a change of approach. While late-Renaissance scholars were largely concerned with ecclesiastical aspects of Arabic Bible versions, the growing physical access

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1. Pockoke was an ordained priest in the Church of England and an alumnus of Corpus Christi College at Oxford. He spent several years in Constantinople and Aleppo, during which time he collected hundreds of oriental manuscripts (purchased by Oxford in 1693). The position of Laudian Professor of Arabic to which he was appointed was established in 1636 by William Laud, who at the time was Chancellor of the University of Oxford and Archbishop of Canterbury. See the delightful illustrated post by a contributor to our anthology, Michael G. Wechsler, "Edward Pococke and the Emergence of Arabic Studies in Late-Renaissance Europe," https://biblia-arabica. com/edward-pococke. On the Renaissance period and its shortage of manuscripts, see Karl Dannenfeld, "The Renaissance Humanists and the Knowledge of Arabic," *Studies in the Renaissance* 2 (1955): 96–117.

to manuscripts in the seventeenth century, compounded by the invention of moveable type, played a seminal role in the European flowering of Arabic studies. On the one hand, this was the era of the lavish polyglots, such as those printed in London (1653–1657) and Paris (1628–1645), which expanded general attention to the field and included Arabic Bible versions, too.[2] On the other, the valuable manuscript finds facilitated a detailed academic exposure to the precious literary heritage of Arabic and its scholarly appreciation. From the start, leading Semitists were not only concerned with Christian and Muslim Arabic sources, but also with Jewish Arabic literature that they cited profusely in their work, both in the original and in translation. Training in several Semitic languages—especially Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew (often in addition to a classical education in Greek and Latin)—was deep-seated in European scholarship. It enabled a wide comparative outlook on the spectrum of ancient and medieval sources of these three religions (nowadays often called "Abrahamic religions" in order to stress their common heritage). This training eventually led to a second peak in the study of Judeo-Arabic literature during the nineteenth century. The major scholarly figure of this era is Moriz Steinschneider (1816–1906), the Austro-Hungarian Jewish bibliographer and Semitist. His seminal and influential work, *Die arabische Literartur der Juden*, offered the first taxonomic attempt to describe the names, writers, and branches of Judeo-Arabic literature according to the manuscript sources available to him at the time (dating mainly from the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries).[3] Therein Steinschneider described his arduous search for manuscripts throughout

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2. On the Arabic Pentateuch in early printed books, in some of which Saʿadia's Judeo-Arabic Tafsīr figures prominently, see the detailed survey by a contributor to this volume, Ronny Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 108–38.

3. Moriz Steinschneider, *Die arabische Literartur der Juden* (Frankfurt: J. Kauff-mann, 1902). See also the English adaptation of the same work, published in a series of articles as Steinschneider, "Introduction to the Arabic Literature of the Jews," *JQR* 9.2 (1897): 224–39; 9.4 (1897): 604–30; 10.1 (1897): 119–38; 10.3 (1898): 513–40; 11.1 (1898): 115–49; 11.2 (1899): 305–43; 11.3 (1899): 480–89; 11.4 (1899): 585–625; 12.1 (1899): 114–32; 12.2 (1900): 195–212; 12.3 (1900): 481–501; 12.4 (1900): 602–17; 13.1 (1900): 92–110; 13.2 (1901): 296–320; 13.3 (1901): 446–87. See also the recent appraisal of his work by Irene E. Zwiep, "Beyond Orientalism? Steinschneider on Islam, Religion and Plurality," in *Modern Jewish Scholarship on Islam in Context, Rationality, European Borders, and the Search for Belonging*, ed. Ottfried Fraisse (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 202–17.

Europe since 1845, and he expressed his personal esteem for the unique Judeo-Arabic literary culture as follows:

> Arabic and German are the only languages and nationalities which have been of essential and continuing influence on Judaism. A statement of the extent and duration of the usage of the Arabic language by the Jews would, indeed, exceed the limits of what is here our principle subject, viz. the Arabic literature; but here I only give some hints of the life, customs, institutions, and their designations.[4]

The branches of Judeo-Arabic literature surveyed by Steinschneider included poetry, grammatical thought, philosophy, polemics, homiletics, translation, exegesis, medicine, astronomy, and even some specific sub-genres such as designated commentaries on the Ten Commandments. Considering the difficulties that faced him in obtaining manuscript sources and the fact that he had no occasion to avail himself to the Arabic and Judeo-Arabic material in the Cairo Genizah (which was uncovered in 1897), the fruits of Steinschneider's labor are impressive, both in scope and in detail. Much water has flowed under the bridge since then, and our readers interested in the wider picture are warmly encouraged to consult more recent and updated encyclopedic surveys of Judeo-Arabic literature. These include works by Abraham S. Halkin, George Vajda, Norman A. Stillman, Yosef Tobi, and Michael G. Wechsler.[5]

The eventual breakthrough in the sociohistorical and the sociolinguistic study of Judeo-Arabic literature and culture was inevitably linked to the hoard of new manuscript sources uncovered in the Cairo Genizah and in the Karaite *genizot* of the Firkovitch Collections, the bulk of which became fully available to scholars throughout the second half of the twentieth century.[6] The scholarly figure most connected with the reevaluation

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4. Steinschneider, "Introduction," *JQR* 12.3 (1900): 481.

5. Abraham S. Halkin, "Judaeo-Arabic Literature," *EncJud* 10:410–23; George Vajda, "Judaeo-Arabic Literature," *EI*² 4:303–7; Norman A. Stillman, "Judeo-Arabic History and Linguistic Description," *EJIW* 3:53–58; Yosef Tobi, "Literature, Judeo-Arabic," *EJIW* 3:271–78; Michael G. Wechsler, "Interpretation, History of: Medieval Judaism in Arabic-Speaking Lands," *EBR* 13:95–105.

6. On the Cairo Genizah finds and research on them, see Stefan C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo: The History of Cambridge University's Genizah Collection* (Richmond, Surry: Curzon Press, 2000); Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York: Schocken, 2011).

of this literature during this period is the German-born Jewish historian, Semitist, and ethnographer Shelomo Dov Goitein (1900–1985), known for his research on Jewish life in the Islamic Middle Ages. He was appointed professor of Islamic history and Islamic studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1928, and in 1957 he took the chair of Arabic studies at the University of Pennsylvania, finally to become in 1971 a member of the prestigious Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton. I focus on this meteoric career in order to illustrate the rise of the field and Goitein's immense contribution to its wider outreach and acknowledgment, including the training of a whole generation of leading scholars who worked on Judeo-Arabic materials in Israel and the United States (among them Mark R. Cohen, Mordechai A. Friedman, and Moshe Gil).[7] In bringing the field to the limelight of the sociohistorical school current at his time, Goitein recognized the insufficiency of classicist categories in describing the Judeo-Arabic oeuvre. He turned specifically to the documentary, everyday-type materials in the Cairo Genizah (personal letters, accounts, legal responses, bills, stock lists, etc.), as an alternative source for sociohistorical study, and less to Judeo-Arabic literature per se. Nevertheless, our readers are well-advised to consult his six-volume magnum opus, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*.[8] While Goitein addressed literary Judeo-Arabic sources (including Bible exegesis) in his monumental work, especially in the fourth volume of *Mediterranean Society*, these became a primary focus of research onto themselves later in the 1990s.[9]

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7. To gauge the spirit of the time, see Sabine Schmidtke's illuminating essay, "Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the Institute of Advanced Study: A Historical Sketch," in *Studying the Near and Middle East in the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton, 1935–2018*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2018), xxxi–xcviii.

8. Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967–1993).

9. On Arabic materials in the Cairo Genizah, see Geoffrey Khan, "The Arabic Fragments in the Cambridge Genizah Collections," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 1 (1986): 54–61. On the Judeo-Arabic materials, see Colin F. Baker, "Judaeo-Arabic Material in the Cambridge Genizah Collections," *BSOAS* 58 (1995): 445–54; and Colin F. Baker and Meira Polliack, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections, Arabic Old Series (T–S Ar. 1a–54)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Meira Polliack, "Arabic Bible Translations in the Cairo Genizah Collection in *Jewish Studies in a New Europe: The Proceedings of the Fifth Congress of*

Looking back at these scholars, many of whom (such as Jacob Mann) I have omitted from this cursory opening survey, we generally miss the old European vantage point today. Now scholarly training for Semitists tends to be more narrow; combining Hebrew and Arabic to the same or close degree of expertise has become uncommon. Yet each age has its advantages too: in the past, Judeo-Arabic literature was not so much considered as a *sui generis* phenomenon which requires—indeed demands—independent tools of research. Its study suffered from the effects of its nineteenth-century portrayal as an "admixed" (then a dubious word) literature, addressing Jewish themes in an Arabic tongue or Arabic themes in a Jewish tongue, thus "impure" in its forms of expression and writing. As data, learning, and research trends change over time, we have become more careful of tendentiously and ideologically framing a culture, though perhaps not enough so. Generally, and in the present day, scholars make more of an attempt to understand the textual phenomena (such as the Judeo-Arabic literature represents) as literature produced by a multicultural, hybrid/mixed society, of the kind that no doubt existed in the premodern Islamic world, and without dismissing its historical development and complexities.

What might we mean by hybrid/mixed culture? Nowadays these terms tend to describe such a society as if it were a multicolored tapestry or mosaic of cultural and linguistic strands and identities. This is not to be confused with inauthenticity or lack of genuineness. Hence, the term *Judeo-Arabic literature* designates the rich oeuvre—literary, religious, popular, and scientific—created by the Jews of Islamic lands in the Arabic language during the medieval and modern periods (although the latter period does not concern us in this volume and, due to its special developments, merits a separate one).

The Judeo-Arabic Language

Essentially, this language is a form of medieval (also termed "Middle") Arabic that deviates from Classical Arabic in that it reflects some neo-Arabic dialectical features and pseudo-corrective elements. It is also distinguished by two other salient features that act as Jewish identity

markers: the use of Hebrew rather than Arabic script in writing; and the occurrence of Hebrew and Aramaic words within the Arabic text, sometimes in Arabized form, such as *leshon qodesh* ("holy tongue"), *shabbat* ("Sabbath day"), and *al-torah* ("the Torah").

Accordingly, one cannot end this short stroll into the history of research without mentioning Joshua Blau's seminal studies on the linguistic features of Judeo-Arabic. These have contributed immensely to the flowering of research on Judeo-Arabic literary sources, above all his groundbreaking (and still the most definitive) *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic* and his foundational study *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic*.[10] Early in Blau's seminal works, the term *Middle Arabic* was used to describe Judeo-Arabic both chronologically (referring to its medieval stage, as a link between Old and New Arabic) and stylistically (in designating the admixture of Classical Arabic and vernacular elements akin to modern [spoken] Arabic). In the revised editions, Blau refined the definition of Middle Arabic texts as constituting "a continuum of a whole range of styles with infinitely varied mixtures of Classical and Neo-Arabic elements."[11] This is no small matter, as it goes to show the changing perspective on the linguistic features of Judeo-Arabic and its long history, both as a written and as a spoken language, that are reflected in its vast and important literature from medieval to modern times. The term *mixed* is thus increasingly used to give fair expression to the social functions (and agility) of its spoken and written forms. In his important sociolinguistic studies, Benjamin H. Hary convincingly and consistently argued over the last decades that Judeo-Arabic should be defined as an "ethnolect" or "religiolect" and that it reflects a state of "multiglossia" rather than "diglossia" since it is a mix of "elements of Classical Arabic, dialectal components, pseudo-corrected features and the standardization of such features."[12] Hary further stresses its distinctive nature:

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10. Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980); Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Neo-Arabic and Middle Arabic*, 3rd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1999). For alternative sociolinguistic models in defining Judeo-Arabic, see especially Benjamin H. Hary's important works, including *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic: With an Edition, Translation and Grammatical Study of the Cairene Purim Scroll* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 3–111; Per A. Bengtsson, *Two Arabic Versions of the Book of Ruth: Text Edition and Language Studies* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1995), 85–99.

11. Blau, *Emergence*, 217.

12. Hary, *Multiglossia*, xiii (quotation) and 55–69. Also consider, in this respect,

Judaeo-Arabic is not just a language, it is a Jewish language, typical of Jewish communities in the Diaspora which adopted a local language and wrote in Hebrew script with Hebrew and Aramaic elements penetrating the lexicon and the grammar. The language was used by Jews for Jewish readers and speakers and treated mainly Jewish themes in its literature. This, by itself, justifies granting Judeo-Arabic the status of a separate language or at least a separate ethnolect.[13]

In this respect, Judeo-Arabic belongs to the family of Jewish languages, including Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) and Judeo-German (Yiddish). These functioned—throughout lengthy periods and in defined geographical areas—as live oral and literary media for Jewish identity in the diaspora. In comparison to Ladino and Yiddish, it is possible to argue that Judeo-Arabic had the most formative and lasting effect on the spiritual and creative life of the Jewish people as a whole.

Why might we claim this? First, because, as Stillman states, "it was the medium of expression for one of the foremost periods of Jewish cultural and intellectual creativity."[14] Second, since it set an unprecedented and rarely surpassed range of branches, subject fields, and genres in nonfiction and fiction, which became the backbone of Jewish medieval literature, and without which we cannot envisage the development of modern Hebrew literature and Jewish thought as a whole.

Judeo-Arabic Literature

One may find a bird's eye view of the spectrum of Judeo-Arabic literature in the following short survey of its literary branches.

Theology, General Philosophy and Ethics. Includes, in this order, the major works of Saʿadia Gaon, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (*Kitāb al-ʾamānāt*

Blau's emphasis (*Emergence*, 49): "It was felt by the Jews themselves to be a distinct literary language. It was consequently used by writers who could equally well have written in more Classical language, had they so chosen, and its distinctive character finds expression in the possession of its own literary tradition."

13. Hary, *Multiglossia*, 105. See also Meira Polliack, "Single-Script Mixed-Code Literary Sources from the Cairo Genizah and Their Sociolinguistic Context," in *Jewish Languages in Historical Perspective*, ed. Lily Kahn (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 65–91.

14. Norman A. Stillman, *The Language and Culture of the Jews of Sefrou, Morocco: An Ethnolinguistic Study* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1988), 3–4.

wal-ʾiʿtiqādāt);[15] Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn*); and Maimonides, *Eight Chapters* (*Thamāniyyah fuṣūl*, originally his introduction to his commentary on Mishnah Avot, yet circulated separately).

Mystical Works. Reflecting Islamic Sufi influences alongside those of ancient Jewish mysticism, for example, Baḥya ibn Paqudah, *Duties of the Hearts* (*Kitāb al-hidāyah ʾilā farāʾiḍ al-qulūb*).

Polemical Literature. Anti-Christian works such "The Polemic of Nestor the Priest" (*Qiṣṣat mujadalat al-ʾusquf*).

Legal (halakhic) Works. Maimonides's Judeo-Arabic commentary on the Mishnah and many other monographs and compositions that discuss or enumerate religious laws in the Mishnah and Talmud, often by the *Geonim* (the heads of the *yeshivot*, the hallowed medieval Jewish learning centers of Iraq and Eretz Israel, such as Saʿadia, Hai Gaon, and Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon).

Liturgy and Prayer. *Siddurim* (prayer books) by Saʿadia Gaon and Solomon ben Nathan of Sijilmasa (southwest Morocco). In these the liturgical instructions (rubrics) are in Judeo-Arabic, while the prayer text is in Hebrew. They also contain original Judeo-Arabic liturgy or translations of specific prayers, such as the Eighteen Benedictions.

Literature, Midrash, and Folklore. A common source of popular and ethical legends is Nissim Gaon's *Book of Comfort after Adversity* (known as *Ibn Shahin's Kitāb fī al-faraj baʿd al-shiddah*), which makes use of a known Arabic genre by this name and also derives from Hebrew midrashic literature. Similar in popularity, though more strictly adaptive of midrashic sources, is the Arabic compilation by David ben Abraham Maimonides known as *Midrash David ha-Nagid*. Proper Arabic translations of classical midrashim such as *Eikhah* (Lamentations) *Rabbah* are also available. A separate genre consists of tales (*qiṣaṣ*) on biblical or apocryphal characters such as Abraham, Joseph, and Hannah, sometimes in rhymed prose, which partly derives from late Muslim sources.[16] There are also popular historical chronicles, including the Alexander Romance and Arabic accounts of the Maccabee history, and literary works such as *The Thousand and One Nights* and *Kalila wa-dimna*, attested in Arabic and Hebrew script. To these may

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15. Please note that, when transliterating from Arabic into English, except for Arabic book titles and some other cases, we have generally opted to leave out hyphens for long vowels, in order to facilitate the flow of the reading for those uninformed in Arabic. See further below on our editorial decisions.

16. Rachel Hasson's contribution on Solomon in our volume pertains to this genre.

be added transcribed sections of the Qur'an and the Arabic New Testament. The *maqamah*, gird poem (*muwashaḥ*), love poem (*ghazal*), and rhymed prose (*saj'*) are also attested, both in Arabic and in Judaeo-Arabic, as original compositions or as transcriptions from known Arabic works.

Poetics. This subfield is likewise represented, especially Moses ibn Ezra's *Book of Discussion and Conversation* (*Kitāb al-muḥāḍarah wal-mudhākarah*).

Science and Medicine. Including mathematics, engineering, astronomy, astrological almanacs, calendrical treatises relating to intercalation, and dream interpretation manuals. Magic and occultism fall under the wider conception of the sciences in the early medieval period. The medical literature is particularly rich and its subject matter varies considerably, consisting of medicine proper (such as the description of diseases, diagnosis and treatment, pharmacology) and paramedical material relating to the management of patients and the medical profession.[17]

Hebrew Grammar and Masora. This genre brings us closer to the subject matter of our volume. It includes grammatical and lexicographical works on biblical Hebrew, such as Jonah ibn Janaḥ's *Book of Roots* (*Kitāb al-ʾuṣūl*), Saʿadia's treatise on seventy Hebrew *hapax legomena* (*Kitāb al-sabʿīn lafẓah*), or David ben Abraham al-Fāsī's Hebrew-Arabic Dictionary (*Kitāb jāmiʿ al-ʾalfāẓ*);[18] and masoretic compilations, such as Mishael ben Uzziel's *Book of Differences* (*Kitāb al-khilaf*), which relates to the differences between Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali on the reading tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Grammatical commentaries that focus on syntactical issues, rare words, and etymologies, while commenting on a biblical passage, also belong to this category.

Yet most notable among all Judeo-Arabic branches is systematic *Biblical Interpretation*, to which our volume anthology is mostly devoted. About a quarter of the literary corpus that has survived in manuscripts belongs to this category. This proportion certainly reflects the importance of Hebrew Bible translations and commentaries in the reading and education system of Jews from Islamic lands. The commentaries are often divided into Rabbanite or Karaite works, or "schools" in various discussions of biblical reception history, yet early on we made the decision to

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17. See the detailed introduction in Haskell D. Isaacs, ed., *Medical and Paramedical Manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

18. See Esther Gamliel-Barak's contribution about this dictionary (129–38).

present them here together, as part of the same cloth of Judeo-Arabic Bible exegesis from Islamic lands. The Karaite movement, which emerged mainly in Iraq in the late ninth century, was an integral part of medieval Judaism. Its main ethos was scriptural and messianic: it espoused a full spiritual and intellectual return to the Hebrew Bible and to the promised land, and it indeed settled in Jerusalem where the Karaites established a thriving learning center in the tenth–eleventh centuries. We shall return to them later on, yet they are interlaced with Rabbanite authors in our volume, quite intentionally. Readers will also note the interwoven aspect of grammatical debate in many of the commentaries, and their overlapping with philosophy and theology. This is precisely the type of fusion one will find in Judeo-Arabic Bible exegesis. It reflects the rich intellectual world of its authors: often they will discuss purely theological and even philosophical themes, such as the nature of creation and humans or a complex syntactical issue, as part of their insightful literary engagement with various biblical passages.

The multifarious nature of Judeo-Arabic literature transpires even from a short survey of this kind. It is the tendency of classification to simplify complex, multilayered literary phenomena, and thus it can only capture a glimpse of the intricacy and vastness of Judeo-Arabic literature, whose creativity was fueled by the ability to transfer, transmit, and filter various subject matter from Hebrew and Arabic into Judeo-Arabic. The new literary forms created through this process—in fiction and nonfiction—were often born out of old forms (originally available to the Jews in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Arabic literatures) by way of inversion, displacement, and combination. The media of translation and adaptation functioned as a sieve through which known classes of texts were passed and transformed into something different and new. The norms of the recognizable old forms retained visibility by being transgressed, and they were often revitalized by becoming refashioned norms.

More on the Genre of Judeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis

Translation and adaptation were thus the activators of the various genres of Judeo-Arabic literature. As the reader of this volume may note, the classes of texts that were born of this process, among them Bible exegesis and translation, were often highly innovative and even subversive in respect to the cultural horizons of their authors, a fact that allowed for their development and growth.

No matter how complex the Judeo-Arabic text or commentary to which you are drawn in your reading, do keep in mind that in part it reflects a written or oral tradition, which in some intricate way came about through different registers of language, from Classical to Middle Arabic or vice versa, from Hebrew or Arabic into Judeo-Arabic. This is partly the reason for the difficulty in translating it into communicative English. The editors and various contributors have gone a long way towards this end, in order to enable a natural reading flow in English.

In Judeo-Arabic Bible commentary, earlier Jewish exegetical traditions inevitably went through a change of content, which mediated between them and the Arabic target culture as a whole, while new layers and insights were forged and sealed. The beginning and end of this process of transculturation are difficult to envisage, yet it was a process typical of Jewish existence in the diaspora as a whole.[19] From the earliest periods of encounter with host languages and cultures, long before the contacts with the Arabs, Jews applied the media of translation and adaptation (for example, into Greek, Aramaic, and Persian) as a means of bridging the gap between the old and the new, between the self and the other; thus they retained an independent, agile, and vibrant identity. It is likely that these long adaptive modes of cultural interaction were regenerated in the encounter with Arabic thought and literature, becoming a means of self-expression for any Jew who spoke or wrote in Arabic. If the boundaries of our world correspond to those of our language, then one who absorbs a bilingual or multilingual atmosphere from early childhood is likely to experience interchangeable mental boundaries. For such a person, reading a biblical commentary in Judeo-Arabic serves not only as a cultural outlet, but also as a psychological outlet of primary importance in that it enables some level of integration between different self-identities. It is apparent that Jewish existence in the world of Islam and the cultural flowering it inspired turned new modes into an essential medium of self-expression and creativity in various forms of Jewish language usage, whether spoken or written, sacred or mundane.

Yet setting this scholarly history aside, an informed reader may well ask several questions.

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19. On the term *transculturation*, which designates transference on the combined levels of language and culture in all that they entail, see James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (repr. London: SCM, 1981), 4. Consider also his general study on the contrasts between Greek and Hebrew thought (8–45).

(1) *Why did medieval Jews use the Arabic language for writing on the Bible in the first place? Was not Hebrew their literary and consecrated tongue?* The answer to this question has been partly supplied above, yet it is complex. Yes, since ancient times and throughout their history and in different places, Jews continued to write and read in Hebrew, though often in conjunction with other host culture languages such as Greek and Aramaic. In the medieval Islamic world, Jews also retained Hebrew for prayer, liturgy, poetry, jurisprudence, and some personal correspondence, as evidenced in the Cairo Genizah sources.[20] The Jews adopted Arabic for nonfictional purposes, as did many Christians in the region, mainly in their philosophical, scientific, and exegetical literature. This process was closely and naturally linked to the advent and spread of Islam from the seventh century CE, and to the diffusion and use of Arabic throughout the Middle East and southern Mediterranean (not only as a spoken language but also as a language of literary expression) from the eighth century. The Jews took strongly to Arabic for many reasons, such as social mobility and access to wider culture, but also due to its closeness to Hebrew. They began writing and reading it, in Hebrew script, as early as the late ninth century.

(2) *Why did they not use Arabic script but preferred to transliterate Arabic into Hebrew letters?* This is probably due to sociolinguistic as well as cultural issues. Jews learned to read Hebrew as part of their religious upbringing, whereas mastering Arabic script was not as compulsory or as affordable for many. Intellectuals and professionals did, of course, learn the more complicated calligraphy of Arabic writing.

(3) *Yet how was it that the Jews became so immersed in Arabic culture?* Here, too, sociology—namely, minority and majority relations, social mobility, et cetera—is only part of the answer, as is Arabic's linguistic closeness to Hebrew and Aramaic. A lot can be said for the strong influence and dialogue with Islamic literary and intellectual culture as a challenging model for the Jews. Many of the conceptual, methodological, and compositional elements of Jewish Bible exegesis are informed by this model.[21] The readers will no doubt feel the imbued Arabic and Islamic ter-

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20. On the Cairo Genizah, see nn. 6–9 above.

21. On this issue, see Rina Drory's seminal work, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute of Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, 1988), 156–78; and Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and Its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), which contains a synopsis of certain sections of her work in

minology and notions in almost every text in our anthology. They should keep in mind that this was not a necessary choice yet was one which came naturally, whether consciously or unconsciously, to these medieval Jewish authors. It certainly tells us much as to how deeply they felt Arabic culture to be their intellectual home.

Lastly, one should also recall that in the broadest sense the history of Jewish Bible exegesis from Islamic lands, also called Judeo-Arabic Bible interpretation, extends well beyond the linguistic borders of works written in Arabic. It includes works written by Jews in Hebrew in which these distinctively Islamic elements are attested. Famous medieval commentators from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries such as Abraham Ibn Ezra or David Kimhi (RaDak), whose works eventually became canonized in the rabbinic Bibles printed from the sixteenth century, are also part of this story. They were addressing a Jewish audience in Christian Europe that was unfamiliar with Arabic, yet their personal and family roots lay deep in the heritage of Muslim Spain. They were well aware of the vast literature on the Bible originally written in Judeo-Arabic, and they transfused many of its concepts and notions into their Hebrew works. Above all, they retained many of the linguistic-contextual and rationalistic strands typical of "the school of Judeo-Arabic exegesis."[22] Nonetheless, for the purpose of

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Hebrew plus additional materials; Miriam Goldstein, " 'Arabic Composition 101' and the Early Development of Judaeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis," *JSS* 55 (2010): 451–78; Meira Polliack, "Deconstructing the Dual Torah: A Jewish Response to the Muslim Model of Scripture," in *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, ed. Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 113–29.

22. For recent works that attempt an overview of this school's exegetical methodology, see Haggai Ben Shammai, "The Tension between Literal Interpretation and Exegetical Freedom: Comparative Observation on Saadia's Method," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33–50; and also Ben Shammai's earlier "The Exegetical and Philosophical Writing of Saadia: A Leader's Endeavor" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 54 (1993): 63–81; Daniel Frank, *Search Scripture Well: Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of the Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Miriam Goldstein, *Karaite Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem: The Judeo-Arabic Pentateuch Commentary of Yusuf ibn Nuh and Abu al-Faraj Harun* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Meira Polliack, "Concepts of Scripture among the Jews of the Islamic World," in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 80–101.

this volume we have restricted consideration to representing the reader with a tasting menu of exegetical texts written in Judeo-Arabic ranging from the tenth and eleventh centuries, also known as the "classical" and often "golden" formative period of Judeo-Arabic exegesis and creativity at large. Our purpose is to whet the palate of current Bible scholars and students by engaging them in discussions of texts and themes related to the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible, structured accordingly under Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings. We wish to open up this rich and perplexing world through first-hand and often first-time engagement with selected excerpts from this immense and thought-provoking literature that is seldom engaged by the interpretive reading curriculum on the Hebrew Bible or in the study of its reception history. It is for you, our dear readers, to judge if we have done this successfully.

Not all of the major medieval figures are included in our selection, and hence it should not be read as a *definitive* anthology. Nevertheless, the major *Rabbanite* and *Karaite* exegetes of this era are well represented.

(4) *What do we mean by these designations Rabbanite and Karaite?* As already stated, the Karaites represent an intellectually powerful stream in medieval Judaism, which generally rejected the authority of the rabbinic traditions as canonized in the Mishnah and Talmud; they instead offered a return to the Hebrew Bible as part of their restructuring of a scriptural-based Jewish faith. The Rabbanites espoused rabbinic tradition, and the two groups engaged in intensive exegetical and polemical debates. Readers will sense the tension between Scripture and tradition as they delve into the pages of the different commentaries and excerpts. Many of the discussions offered by our contributors hinge on these issues as well.

(5) *Why did Judaism verge on a dogmatic split during this era?* Here again the answer lies in the surrounding culture. Something about the powerful encounter with Islam and its scriptural models led to intellectual unrest and a reexamination of the past.[23]

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23. On Karaism and its history, see Meira Polliack, "Medieval Karaism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 295–326, and further bibliography therein; Yoram Erder, "The Mourners of Zion: The Karaites in Jerusalem in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 213–35; Fred Astren, *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 1–123; Meira Polliack, "Re-thinking Karaism: Between Judaism and Islam," *AJSR* 30 (2006): 67–93; Marina Rustow, *Heresy*

Our Volume, and the Reasons It Has Come to
Fruition in the Here and Now

In early Jewish studies, as they developed in Europe and Israel, the medieval (secular) Hebrew poetry of the Jews of Muslim Spain (Andalucia) had always been regarded as one of the pinnacles of Jewish creativity, studied and taught as an expression of "the Sephardi Golden Era." In this conception were included some major philosophical and poetic works written originally in Judeo-Arabic that had entered the Hebrew canon already in the Middle Ages through medieval Hebrew translations such as *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* by Sa'adia Gaon, *The Kuzari* by Judah Halevi, and *'Arugat Ha-bosem* by Moses ibn Ezra.[24] The medieval translation enterprise of such works (and also of the works by Sa'adia and Maimonides, surveyed above) from Arabic into Hebrew was mainly carried out by the Tibbon family of translators who worked in Provence during the twelfth–thirteenth centuries.[25] Nevertheless, the rich and varied Judeo-Arabic literature written in the Middle East and Spain—in the fields of science, poetics, philosophy and, most notably, Bible exegesis—which was not channeled into the Hebrew corpus by the medieval translators was generally left outside the sphere of scholarly interest, and in many cases it was only preserved in manuscripts or else lost altogether. Though the importance, even if not the extent, of this literature was certainly known in the nineteenth century and, as we have shown, even in the seventeenth century, its research was neglected, often as the result of the purist tendency to concentrate on classical Hebrew sources. Another reason for this relative academic neglect was the modern historical development of Judeo-Arabic literature amongst its native communities. Not only did much of it not reach print and only part of it survive in manuscript sources, but some of it became incomprehensible

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and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 3–288. On the threefold structure of the Judeo-Arabic commentary, see the final section of this introduction.

24. This medieval Hebrew adaptation represents only segments of Moses ibn Ezra's original magnum opus by the Judeo-Arabic title *Maqalat al-ḥadiqa fi ma'ani al-majaz wal-ḥaqiqa* ("Dissertation of the Garden on Figurative and Literal Language"). For a detailed analysis of this work, see P. Fenton, *Philosophie et exégèse dans le Jardin de la métaphore de Moïse Ibn 'Ezra* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

25. On the Tibbon family translation enterprise, see the recent definitive work by Sarah J. Pearce, *The Andalusi Literary and Intellectual Tradition: The Role of Arabic in Judah Ibn Tibbon's Ethical Will* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

due to the adoption of spoken Arabic dialects or spoken Spanish (Ladino) in many of the Jewish oriental communities that had previously mastered classical Judeo-Arabic. This process began in the wake of the disintegration of the Muslim Empire and the great expulsions from Spain during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when waves of Ladino-speaking Jews settled in Arab lands and changed the linguistic fabric of their Jewish communities. This process deepened once the colonial powers, who generally welcomed Jews and were favorable to their social mobility, had encouraged accomplishment in European tongues.[26] The most consistent exception to this rule was the Yemenite community, which up to modern times kept a live tradition of classical Arabic education, including the transmission and reading of Sa'adia's Bible translations and commentaries.[27]

As mentioned in our opening comments, during the last three decades Judeo-Arabic literature in general and Bible exegesis in particular have received wider recognition, although these subjects have certainly been on scholars' tables (so to speak) and continuously studied for over three hundred years. Beyond the complex history of research (which always has its highs and lows, its surges of energy and laidback periods), the current wave is also due to the growing academic and public legitimization of the cultural heritage of the Jews of Islamic lands, in Israel and outside it. There seem to be several factors behind this resurgence. Some are more scientific in nature, for instance, the renewed availability since the 1990s of Judeo-Arabic manuscripts housed in the former Soviet Union, especially those known as the Firkovitch Collections, has partly contributed to the intensification of research into this literature.[28] Other factors are more elusive

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26. For further discussion of these historical-linguistic developments, see, for instance, Stillman, *Language and Culture*, 5.

27. On this unique tradition, see Doron Ya'akov's contribution in this volume (89–100).

28. The newly available manuscripts (also dating from the tenth–thirteenth centuries) were collected in the nineteenth century from Karaite *genizot* in the Middle East by the Russian Karaite scholar and bibliophile Abraham Firkovitch. They are now housed in the Russian National Library; see Malachi Beit-Arié, "Hebrew Manuscript Collections in Leningrad" [Hebrew], *Jewish Studies* 31 (1991): 33–46; Menahem Ben-Sasson, "Firkovitch's Second Collection: Remarks on Historical and Halakhic Materials" [Hebrew], *Jewish Studies* 31 (1991): 47–67; David Sklare, *Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Firkovitch Collections: The Works of Yūsuf al-Basīr* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1997), 7–16; Zeev Elkin and Menahem Ben-Sasson, "Abraham Firkovich and the Cairo Genizas in the Light of his Personal Archive" [Hebrew],

in nature, namely, the theoretical shifts that have occurred, mainly during the past decades, in the humanities in general and in biblical, Jewish, and Islamic studies in particular, including the proliferation and maturation of their subdisciplines and their entering into what may be called a "post-ideological" era.[29] Accordingly, the history of the Jews during the Middle Ages, particularly under Christendom, is not as bound as it was to the Zionist ethos, nor is it studied necessarily as an inevitable precursor to the horrific recent chapter of the age-old Jewish entity in Europe. Islam has always enjoyed a more positive image in this respect. Nevertheless, the study of the history of the Jews of Islamic lands and their literature was to a certain extent subdued under the effects of the modern Arab-Israeli conflict. As this conflict loses its earlier existential bite, it brings with it a palpable relaxation of the former reserve in recognizing the Arabic culture and literary output of the Jews of Islam as a phenomenon worthy of independent research and wider public recognition. The changing of historical consciousness and alternative discourses which have entered Israeli culture have in turn led to a review of the Ashkenazi-centric (European) orientation that characterized modern Zionism and the state of Israel in its first decades, giving way—particularly since the 1980s—to a pluralistic conception of its cultural heritage. This is partly the result of the successful struggle of Jews originating from Islamic lands (who make up a significant portion of Israel's Jewish population) to receive greater appreciation and access to positions of influence in politics, economics, and the academy. More than anything, the growing need for peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians and other Arab nations has also contributed to the maturing of Israeli society and to the loosening of its ideological constraints which identified Arab culture and language with the "enemy." Though isolationist voices still abide (however regrettably, in my view) especially in the political discourse, one can inevitably sense beneath and above the surface of Israeli society a new and welcome cultural openness, most notably towards Arabic music, cuisine, and wider culture. This most naturally converges with a revival of interest in Judeo-Arabic culture and in the long indi-

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Pe'amim 90 (2002): 51–95; Olga Vasilyeva, "Documents in the Firkovich Collection: Valuable Sources on the History of the Jewish Communities in Europe and the Middle East from the Twelfth to the Nineteenth Century," *Karaite Archives* 2 (2014): 201–20.

29. See, in this respect, the remarks concerning the study of the Jews in medieval (Christian) Europe by the historian Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000), 11–15.

vidual history of the major oriental (usually called ʿSephardi or ʿMizraḥi in Hebrew) communities in Israel (North African, Iraqi, Persian, Syrian, Yemenite), especially among second- and third-generation descendants.

Further Insights into the Choice of
Commentaries and Our Editorial Policy

The term *Judeo-Arabic literature* is used to designate all fields of Arabic writing—whether fiction or nonfiction (literary or scientific)—in which the Jews of Arab and Muslim lands gave expression to their interests and creativity. However, our volume concentrates mainly on one of the branches in which this literature reached a peak of creativity: Bible exegesis and the interrelated fields of Bible translation, the study of Biblical Hebrew (its grammar and lexicon), masorah (its reading tradition), and biblical theology. Due to the vastness of this corpus, which stretches from medieval to modern times, most of the selected texts have been delimited to the medieval period, particularly to the golden or classical era of Judeo-Arabic literature (tenth–twelfth centuries), in which it flourished in all genres and subgenres. During this period, Judeo-Arabic spelling stabilized, emulating in the main Classical Arabic orthography with regard to the graphic representation of Arabic *matres lectionis* and other features. This stage is closely identified with the relatively stylized Judeo-Arabic of Saʿadia Gaon, whose works feature prominently in our anthology.[30] In fact, all of the texts in our anthology were written in this type of Judeo-Arabic, also known as Classical Judeo-Arabic.[31] We chose not to include the original texts but only their English translations, so as to minimize the usage of Hebrew and Arabic words for those who might be less familiar with them. We tried to open up these texts to different readers interested in biblical reception history and exegesis from all over the world, making the

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30. See the five detailed contributions in this volume by Vollandt (75–87), Yaʿakov (89–100), Tobi (101–19), Mohammad (193–215), and Wechsler (321–41).

31. For a detailed survey of these historical stages, including the subdivision of the first stage into Pre-Islamic and early Judeo-Arabic and the third stage into Later and Modern (twentieth century) Judeo-Arabic, see Hary, *Multiglossia*, 75–82. On the orthographic distinctions between Preclassical and Classical Judeo-Arabic, see Joshua Blau and Simon Hopkins, "On Early Judaeo-Arabic Orthography," *ZAL* 12 (1984): 9–27; Blau and Hopkins, "Judaeo-Arabic Papyri–Collected, Edited, Translated and Analysed," *JSAI* 9 (1987): 87–160.

texts more user-friendly and accessible. For this reason, too, we chose a minimal transliteration policy of Arabic (and Hebrew) words into English when such words do occur; we distinguish consonants (though Arabic *alif* at the beginning of a word may be omitted at times) but not long vowels or the *shaddah* emphasis (with some exceptions allowed).

To a large degree, this user-friendliness was part and parcel of the primary intention of the Judeo-Arabic Bible commentaries. In the original setting in which they were composed, they were meant to be used as biblical study-aids for everyday readers, and they certainly functioned as such. For this reason, they were cast in a threefold structure, which is reflected in most of the manuscript sources. First, the biblical verse or a cluster of verses was quoted in Hebrew, usually in the form of an *incipit* (the first word or phrase of the given verse) but sometimes in full. Second, the verse was translated into Judeo-Arabic, so as to facilitate its comprehension.[32] In Karaite commentaries (such as those by Salmon ben Yerūḥīm or Yefet ben ʿEli) the translation was usually literal, imitating the grammar and the semantic range of the Hebrew. In Rabbanite translations (such as those by Saʿadia Gaon or Samuel ben Ḥofni), the rendering is more orientated towards the proper forms of Classical Arabic usage. In both traditions the translation is an instructive tool, meant to clarify the biblical Hebrew and its meanings as much as possible. Third, the verse was commented upon in Judeo-Arabic, including explication of matters of language, style, and content. The commentary followed the biblical passages systematically and rarely skipped any issue. This threefold literary structure appears to have entered and stabilized in Jewish writing on the Bible during the Muslim period and to have been influenced by parallel models of Islamic theological discourse and Qur'anic exegesis.[33] We have deliberately retained this style in the excerpts from these works included in this volume. To facilitate reading we have supplied the Arabic verse translation, that is, the second layer described above, not in the original but in an adapted English version, often using the JPS 1985 translation as our base. We have also provided, in some cases, the Hebrew verse in a known English translation. When it comes to the commentaries (the third and widest layer), authors

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32. For additional discussion of Karaite translation methods, see Meira Polliack, "Medieval Karaite Views on Translating the Hebrew Bible into Arabic," *JJS* 47 (1996): 64–84; and Polliack, "Medieval Karaite Methods on Translating of Biblical Narrative into Arabic," *VT* 48 (1998): 375–98.

33. See nn. 21–22 above.

did their utmost to invite readers to savor their range of topics and rich-
ness of expression. Do bear in mind, however, that these are often small
tastes from gigantic works.

Due to various constraints, our volume clearly does not afford the full
array of exegetes or styles active in this period. Many of these Rabbanite
and Karaite exegetes, including Sa'adia, produced commentaries only on
specific books of major interest to them or their public, such as Isaiah,
Job, and texts of the Pentateuch. The one exception is the Karaite exegete
Yefet ben 'Eli, who made it his proclaimed task to translate and comment
in Arabic on the entire Hebrew Bible. He did so in Jerusalem, during the
second half of the tenth century, and his commentaries were cherished by
later generations as well, Karaite and Rabbanite, and hence survived in
hundreds of manuscripts. It is therefore obvious that his portion within
the anthology is significant. Not only did his commentaries give expres-
sion to linguistic-contextual as well as literary and theological methods
developed by the Karaite school, they also collated the opinions of other
commentators, and so they are very much a compendia of the variety
of interpretive opinions known in this era. For the Karaites, translation
remained a major medium in clarifying the literal meaning of the biblical
text. The establishment of primary meaning was also the object of their
grammatical commentaries on the Bible. Grammar and translation were
linked in their system of interpretation: Karaite grammatical thinking had
a clear hermeneutic function in elucidating the literal meaning of the bib-
lical text. The scholar who has devoted several monumental works to this
issue is no other than the leading European Semitist Geoffrey Khan.[34] He
has especially highlighted how the Karaite concern with linguistic form

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34. See Geoffrey Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical
Thought: Including a Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of the Diqduq of Abu
Ya`qub Yusuf ibn Nuh on the Hagiographia* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Khan, *Early Kara-
ite Grammatical Texts*, MasS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Geoffrey
Khan, Maria Angeles Gallego, and Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, *The Karaite Tradition
of Hebrew Grammatical Thought in Its Classical Form* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Khan also
devoted a volume to the Karaites' practices of transcribing the biblical text into Arabic
characters and adding a translation and commentary in Arabic script. In his view, this
reflects their wish to preserve the accurate reading tradition of the biblical text, espe-
cially in cases where contemporary medieval reading traditions were at variance with
the Tiberian masorah. On this, see Khan, *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo
Genizah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Khan, "The Medieval
Karaite Transcriptions of Hebrew into Arabic Script," *IOS* 12 (1992): 157–76.

arose from the conviction that there was a direct link between form and meaning.[35] Grammar and translation served as the building blocks of the Karaite biblical commentaries, whose explicatory layer was usually devoted to what might be called forms of "higher criticism," namely, the discussion of structural, literary, and theological aspects of the biblical text together with additional references, at times, to their symbolic or messianic implications.

By far, the Karaite school produced many more biblical commentaries than did the Rabbanites during this period, for the Karaites were newcomers on the scene and espoused the return to the Bible as the focus of Jewish religion and life. This is why our volume contains slightly more Karaite than Rabbanite materials from these two centuries. Readers will amply sense that ideological tensions and a revamping of the Jewish understanding of biblical law and theology is also often at the heart of the debates—overtly and covertly—in the Karaite commentaries. In the Rabbanite sphere, Saʿadia Gaon's works became dominant early on. In as much as the reception tradition of Saʿadia's works reflects, they seem to have overshadowed the work of his contemporaries and students, although some of these (such as Samuel ben Ḥofni's works) have reached us in good form. We regret we were not able to give more exposure to these commentators in our text selections. Indeed, we focused on the formative era, and so more remains to be done in the future. Leading Judeo-Arabic exegetes active later on in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, especially Isaac ben Samuel (al-Kanzī), Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi, and even Maimonides (whose *Guide to the Perplexed* has many exegetical insights), fell beyond the historical horizon set for this volume, though they are sometimes mentioned or discussed. They shall await their turn of inclusion in other selections in due course. The reader is also invited, accordingly, to read more about them and their works in the recent multivolume and online *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* and the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Basic details on the medieval authors included in our volume (and some others, too) will also be found in our separate list of "Major Judeo-Arabic Commentators" at the beginning of this volume and, of course, through the rich referencing provided in the various contributions.

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35. See Khan, *Early Karaite Tradition*, 9–21, 13–33.

Most of the Judeo-Arabic excerpts provided in English translation have not been published elsewhere or, at the most, are available in distant editions, often without translation (to which references are supplied). The expert scholars who have contributed to this volume offer the very fine fruits of their expertise in the field. Along with select bibliography, they also supply a contextualizing preface and/or an embedded discussion on the interpretive nature of their chosen text. Indeed, we encouraged each contributor to choose where she or he would like to place their pick—bearing in mind, nonetheless, the criteria that the volume should provide an overall tour of the Hebrew Bible, a balanced selection from the Bible's three divisions and major genres, and a chronological focus ranging mainly from the tenth to the eleventh centuries.[36]

We hope this volume will arouse keen interest among a wide and diverse readership and that it bestow upon all of its readers, as well as upon the memory of past generations of scholars and readers, a sense of renewal, in the expression it gives to the continued intellectual and spiritual lives of Bible exegetes from almost a millennium ago. The fruits of their labors are in no uncertain terms still with us.

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36. We are especially grateful to James T. Robinson for offering three contributions to this volume.

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On the Pentateuch

Yefet ben 'Eli on Genesis 11 and 22

Marzena Zawanowska

In this essay I present a taste of Yefet ben 'Eli's complex and sophisticated exegetical approach to the Bible, as reflected in his translation and commentary on the Pentateuch, by foregrounding two passages: Gen 11:1–9 and Gen 22:1–2. The choice of these particular biblical passages was dictated by the fact that they both represent important conundrums and, as such, received much exegetical attention. Therefore, they provide excellent material for illustrating Yefet's innovative approach to interpreting Scripture, which draws upon and creatively transforms a large array of different sources, both Jewish (Rabbanite as well as Karaite) and Muslim. In addition, Yefet's treatment of the story of the city/tower of Babel and the opening verses of the Akedah narrative reflects his sensibilities and unique methods by encapsulating many features characteristic of his entire exegetical oeuvre.

I will proceed as follows. First, I shall cite the relevant biblical Hebrew passage in English translation (based on the English translation of the Jewish Publication Society [JPS] of 1917 and 1985), with slight modifications.[1] The citations will be given verse-by-verse (in italics). The next

1. I would have preferred to use the older JPS translation of 1917 as the base for my translation of the Hebrew text, since it better reflects the underlying Hebrew source text and thus also underscores the instances where Yefet's Arabic translation of the biblical verses differs from the original. For the reasons behind such a decision, see also Michael G. Wechsler, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli the Karaite on the Book of Esther*, Karaite Texts and Studies 1, Études sur le judaïsme

step will be my English translation for each verse of Yefet's Arabic translation to the Hebrew (in bold), followed by my translation of Yefet's Arabic exegesis for the verse(s) (in regular font). The reason behind such a tripartite structure is that it exactly reflects the three-layered division of Yefet's Bible commentaries. Finally, at the end of both sections I offer short conclusions—a sort of gain-and-loss account—in which I try to address the question of whether Yefet's wrestling with exegetical cruxes posed by the story of the tower/city of Babel and the Akedah narrative has been done successfully and whether he provides valuable and compelling solutions also from a modern reader's perspective. My comments, discussion, and additional comparative materials are presented in the footnotes.

<div align="center">Genesis 11:1–9</div>

(v. 1) *And all the earth was of one language and of one speech* [Heb. *dəbārîm ʾaḥādîm*]

And all the inhabitants[2] **of the earth were of one language and of one speech** [**Arab. *khuṭab***].

We have already said [earlier] that the statement *every one after his tongue* (Gen 10:5) refers to [the situation] after the generation of dispersion.[3]

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médiéval 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151. However, since the 1917 translation on its own would look quaint and archaic—even grammatically wrong at places—to contemporary readers, as signaled by the JPS decision itself to produce a newer translation that accounts for both English-language developments as well as scholarly developments, I settle here largely for a combination and a mixture with the newer translation.

2. For a similar addition in translation, provided by Saʿadia, see Joseph Derenbourg, *Version arabe du Pentateuque de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyoûmî*, vol. 1 of *Œuvres complètes de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyoûmî* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1979), 18. For an English translation, see Michael Linetsky, *Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation: Annotated and Translated by Michael Linetsky* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2002), 235.

3. Hebrew *Dōr ha-pəlāgā* ("generation of dispersion," "generation of split," or "generation of separation [of races]"). According to the Midrash this generation was removed two years from the generation of flood, as it is written, *Shem begot Arpachshad two years after the flood* (Gen 11:10). At this time the generation of separation begun, though the separation actually took place only 340 years after the flood. See Gen. Rab. 26:3; 38:2, 9.

And this chapter comes to explain to us how [did it happen that] many languages were created in the world as well as to indicate the reason why many languages were created.[4] Thus [Scripture] says that before their languages were confounded, all the inhabitants of the earth had one language. It was *the holy tongue* [Heb. *ləshōn ha-qōdēsh*] in which the Lord of the universe spoke to Adam and in which Adam called the names of animals and other things.[5] Neither he nor his children ceased to speak this language until the generation of dispersion, and they knew no other.

As to the expression *and of one speech,* it means that as long as their language was one language, there was no disagreement between them with regard to noun [forms] and in speech, [especially in terms of] verb declination, as [is the case with] the Arabs [who] disagree with regard to many nouns and in speech. So [Scripture] indicates that at that time

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4. A similar historical-etiological explanation of the reason why the story of the tower of Babel was told and included in Scripture is provided by another Karaite exegete from Jerusalem, Yeshuʿah ben Yehudah. In his view, its aim is to explain the existing divisions of lands. See MS RNL Yevr-Arab 1:3204, fol. 57b. For the emergence of historical sensibilities among the medieval Karaites as reflected in their interpretations of this pericope, see Marzena Zawanowska, "The Discovery of History in Medieval Bible Exegesis. Islamic Influences on the Emergence of Historical Sensibilities Among the Karaites as Exemplified in Their Innovative Treatment of the Story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9)," forthcoming. For a study of historicizing tendencies in Yefet ben ʿEli reading of prophetic literature, see Meira Polliack, "Historicizing Prophetic Literature: Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary on Hosea and Its Relationship to al-Qumisi's Pitron," in *Pesher Nahum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Michael G. Wechsler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 149–86.

5. Some other medieval Karaite exegetes, such as Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī, also upheld a view that Hebrew was the primordial language of humanity. In his opinion, this language was subsequently preserved among the religious people who keep divine commandments. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4529, fol. 23a. Others were uncertain about it. For example, in the commentary on the Torah written by Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ (and abridged by his student Abū al-Faraj Hārūn), known as the *Talkhīṣ*, we read that "the expression *of one language* (v. 1) means that at that time all the people spoke one language, either Hebrew, or Persian, or another." See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 53b. For studies of the Karaites' exegesis of the story of the city/tower of Babel, and especially their discussions of the origin and nature of human languages, see Miriam Goldstein, *Karaite Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem: The Judeo-Arabic Pentateuch Commentary of Yusuf ibn Nuh and Abu al-Faraj Harun* (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2011), 151–61; Arye Zoref, "Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī's Position in the Debate over the Formation of Language" [Hebrew], *Ginzei Qedem* 12 (2016): 127–54.

there was no disagreement between them as to the matters of this sort.[6] But some say that the expression *and of one speech* means [that they were all] of one view and of one will, and therefore they did not disagree when one of them proposed, *Come, let us make bricks, [and burn them thoroughly]* (v. 3).[7]

> (v. 2) *And it came about, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.*

And it came about, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Iraq and settled there.

[Scripture] has already indicated that the ark [of Noah] rested upon the mount Judi [Arab. *Qardu*].[8] Here it informs [us] that they journeyed from there, and when they came to this plain, they settled in it. It is possible that they headed for the land of Israel [Arab. *bilad al-Shām*],[9] or that they wandered the world in search of a place that would suit them. But since they found this plain suitable for them, they settled in it.

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6. A similar explanation of the expression *and of one speech* (v. 1) as meaning a common pronunciation was expressed by the authors of the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ and Abū al-Faraj Hārūn), who also contrast this with the situation in Arab lands, where there are different manners of speech (dialects). See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 53b.

7. Most likely, Yefet alludes here to a view expressed by Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī who, following an old midrashic explanation, interpreted this expression as meaning that the builders of the tower were of one opinion and one faith. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4529, fol. 23a.

8. Arabic *Jibāl Qarda* (lit. "mounts Qardu"). According to an early Christian as well as Islamic tradition, after the flood, Noah's ark came to rest on Mount Judi (Arab. *al-Jūdiyy*; Aram. *Qardū*; Syr. Qardū), traditionally identified with a peak near the town of Jazirat ibn Umar (modern Cizre), at the headwaters of the Tigris, near the modern Syrian–Turkish border. The identification of this mountain as the landing site (*apobaterion*, or "place of descent") of the ark is found in Syriac and Armenian tradition throughout late antiquity, and later on also in Islamic tradition (see, e.g., in the Qurʾan, Q Hud 11:44). With time, however, it was abandoned for the tradition equating this location with the highest mountain of the region, viz., Mount Ararat. For the sake of comparison, Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī does not try to identify the place, while the authors of the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ and Abū al-Faraj Hārūn) limit themselves to stating that it was "in the East of the land of Shinar." See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 39a.

9. Arabic *bilad al-Shām*, a term denoting the entire region of Syria, but often used in medieval Karaite commentaries specifically in reference to the land of Israel.

(v. 3) *And they said to one another: "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen*[10] *had they for mortar.*

And they said to one another: "Come, let us make brick,[11] **and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick instead of stone, and bitumen had they instead of mortar.**

[Scripture] indicates that one turned to another in exhortation to make brick and burn them, so that they be the lightest and most durable [possible]. [It also informs us] that they made brick instead of [using] stone, which [usually] serves to raise [high] constructions [Arab. *dawāmis*],[12] and that they used bitumen instead of mortar to cover up with it the walls, so that the building be firm.[13] Thus they made brick and burned them and prepared the bitumen.

(v. 4) *And they said: "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; else we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."*

Then[14] **they said: "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."**

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10. Hebrew *ḥemār*, "bitumen." The JPS has "slime."

11. Yefet uses the singular here as a collective noun, whereas the Hebrew text has the plural.

12. Arabic *dawāmis*. For various possible meanings of this term, see Dionisius A. Agius, *Arabic Literary Works as a Source of Documentation for Technical Terms of the Material Culture* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1984), 214–15.

13. A similar explanation is provided by Yeshuʿah ben Yehudah, who posits that the builders used bricks not only because they were more durable than stone, but also because stone was unavailable to them. See MS RNL Yevr-Arab 1:3204, fols. 58a–b.

14. On Yefet's (and Saʿadia's) tendency to specify in translation the meaning of the Hebrew conjunction *vāv*, which typically opens biblical verses, see Meira Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation: A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E*, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 102–18; Marzena Zawanowska, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10–25:18)*, Karaite Texts and Studies 4,

[Scripture] indicates that when they prepared the brick and the bitumen, they said to one another: "Let us build one city, that we may all live in it, and let us also build a tower rising into the sky, to make us a name forever, thanks to the building of this tower. And let us gather in this city, lest we should be scattered in the world and separated from one another."[15]

It [also] informs [us] that their intention was against the will of God, blessed and exalted, who ordered them: *spread out in the earth and multiply within it* (Gen 9:7), and said: *and replenish the earth* (Gen 1:28).[16] It [= this divine order] was beneficial to them, because [thanks to it], they [could] expand the place of [their] residence, and [also] because in every area there are mineral resources and fruits which are not [available] in another, and [thereby] people [could] diversify their means of living.

It [was] also so that they may see the wonders of the Lord of the universe in terms of the diversity of climates, grounds, mineral resources, and plants of [different] lands, as well as that they may contemplate the stars which appear in one region and district, but are invisible in another. Thus they would praise the Lord of the universe who created the creatures in diversity, the reason for [the existence of] them all being his wisdom. Yet, all these notwithstanding, they sought to gather in one place. Therefore, God scattered their gathering, and their wish was not fulfilled, as it says:

(v. 5) *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men* [Heb. *bəney ha-ʾadam*] *built.*[17]

And the Lord of the universe came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men[18] began to build.

Études sur le Judaïsme médiéval 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 173, and further bibliography there.

15. When commenting on this passage, Yeshuʻah ben Yehudah adds another practical reason for the building of a high tower, "to be seen from afar, so that if someone goes out of the city and gets lost on his way, he [could] perceive [the tower] and head for it." See MS RNL Yevr-Arab 1:3204, fol. 58b.

16. Also the authors of the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, Abū al-Faraj Hārūn) emphasize that the builders of the tower acted against the will of God as expressed in Gen 9:7. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 40a.

17. The JPS has "builded."

18. Yefet uses here the Hebrew *bəney ʾadam*—without the definite article *ha*. The MT here has, literally, *sons* of man.

(v. 6) *And the Lord said, "If, as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they may propose to do will be prevented from them.*

And the Lord of the universe said: "If as one people with one language for all, this is how they have begun to act, then nothing that they desired to do will be prevented from them.

(v. 7) [*Come*]*, let us go down, and confound there their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech."*

[Come,] let us go down, in order to confound there their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech."[19]

The statement *And the Lord came down* (v. 5) refers to the angel of the Lord.[20] For it is the custom of Scripture [Arab. *rasm al-kitāb*] to use a concise style [= ellipsis] [Arab. *'ala tarīq al-ikhtiṣār*],[21] just like it says: *And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai* (Exod 19:20), meaning by this [that]

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19. Sa'adia adds his amendments already on the level of translation by rendering this verse with, "Let us go and I shall bring down an instruction of intimidation and I will disperse their language by it." See Derenbourg, *Version arabe du Pentateuque de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyoûmî*, 18. For an English translation, see Linetsky, *Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation*, 235.

20. Ya'qūb al-Qirqisānī also ascertains that it was not God himself who descended to see the city, but he enlists different buffer words than Yefet to distance the Creator from his creatures, namely "his order" and "his power" (Arab. *amruhu wa-qudratuhu*). See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4529, fol. 25a.

21. Arabic *ikhtiṣār* ("ellipsis"). On different uses of the Arabic concept of *ikhtiṣār* ("ellipsis") in medieval Karaite commentaries, see Geoffrey Khan, ed. and trans., *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought, Including a Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of the* Diqduq *of Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ on the Hagiographa*, Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 48–49, 128–31, 147 (syntactic ellipsis); Meira Polliack, "The Unseen Joints of the Text: On Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Concept of Ellision (*iḫtiṣār)* and Its Gap-filling Functions in Biblical Interpretation," in *Words, Ideas, Worlds in the Hebrew Bible—The Yairah Amit Festschrift*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank Polak (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 179–205 (narrative gaps); Marzena Zawanowska, " 'Where the Plain Meaning is Obscure or Unacceptable …': The Treatment of Implicit Anthropomorphisms in the Medieval Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation," *EJJS* 10 (2016): 1–49 (stylistic ellipses).

the glory of the Lord [came down]. It condenses, since the descent of the angel was upon the order of God and according to his will.

And [God] sent the angel so that he observed their [= the inhabitants of Babel] actions, just like he sent the messengers to Sodom, so that they observed their [= the inhabitants of Sodom] actions, as it is said *I will go down now, and see* (Gen 18:21). Likewise it says here: *And the Lord came down to see* (v. 5).

Two opinions are said with regard to the statement *which* [*the children of men*] *built* (v. 5). The first of which is that [Scripture] refers [here] to what they intended to build, since afterwards it says: *and they stopped building the city* (v. 8), and they did not build anything. The second of which is that they have already begun to build. And [if so], the statement *and they stopped building the city* (v. 8) means that they ceased building. It is a more likely [interpretation], since it says [*And the Lord came down*] *to see the city* [*and the tower*], and it would not have said *to see*, had not there been a visible construction there.

And [Scripture] rightly [specifies and] says *the children of men* (v. 5) [to avoid confusion], because in the same verse it mentions the descent of the angel, just like [God] used to talk with Ezekiel and with Daniel, and say *the son of man* [Heb. *ben 'adam*], since there were angels standing [there too].

Next [Scripture] indicates that when the angel saw their [= the inhabitants'] actions, he said: "These people gathered into one gathering and speak one language, and therefore they could realize what they intended to [do]."

[As to the statement this is how they have begun to act (v. 6), it means] that it was the first action by which they began to disobey [God]. But some say that it refers to the first construction that they began [to build].

As to the statement *then nothing* [*that they may propose to do*] *will be prevented from them* (v. 6), it means that until that time nothing of what they intended to do had been disallowed.

They said: *Come, let us make bricks* [*and burn them thoroughly*] (v. 3): "I let them make a free choice, and they fulfilled their will."

Next they said: *Come, let us build us a city* (v. 4): "I let them start to build; and had I let them, they would have finished the building. But let us go down for the second time in order to punish [them]."

So, for the first time the angel descended [merely] *to see the city* [*and the tower*] (v. 5). Afterwards, he descended for the second time in order to confound their language and scatter them in the world. And the expression [*Come,*] *let us go down* (v. 7) is like the statement *Let us make man*

(Gen 1:26), namely, it is a majestic plural [Heb. *ləšōn gədūlā*],[22] employed by all users of languages [Arab. *ahl al-lugha*].[23]

As to [God's] words, *and confound there* (v. 7), they mean the confusion of their language so that they may not understand one the language of another. Some say that, [as a result], every group had a language only of its own, that no one else [could] understand.

Next [Scripture] indicates that having confounded their language, [God] scattered them from the plain, so that they spread in the world, as it is said:

> (v. 8) *Thus the Lord scattered them from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.*

Thus the Lord of the universe scattered them from there over the face of all the earth; and they were prevented from building the city.

> (v. 9) *That is why its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the language of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

That is why its name was called Babel, because there the Lord of the universe confounded the language of all the inhabitants of the earth; and from there he scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

[Scripture] says, *and they stopped building the city* (v. 8) and omits [Arab. *ikhtaṣara*] mentioning the *tower*, since the *tower* is [included] within the city. It is possible that the statement *That is why was the name of it called*

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22. Hebrew *ləšōn gədūlā* (lit. "majestic language") is used in the manuscript. On the use of *pluralis majestatis* in medieval Karaite commentaries, see Yair Zoran, "The Majestic Plural [*Pluralis majestatis*]: The Plural of Respect" [Hebrew], *Beit Mikra* 143 (1995): 402–3.

23. Arabic *ahl al-lugha* (lit. "people of language"). On this term as designating rather "language community" or "linguistic community" in the sense of "native speakers" rather than "philologists," "linguists," or "grammarians," see Daniel Frank, *Search Scripture Well: Karaite Exegetes and the Origins of the Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East*, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 29 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 52. Cf. Goldstein, *Karaite Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem*, 33 and n. 37 there.

Babel (v. 9) was [pronounced by] Noah, since he was the leader of the generation, but it is [also] possible that it was [pronounced by] the Lord of the universe. And [Scripture] indicates that the name Babel was derived from the event, but an additional [letter] *beth* [= *b*] was added to the name, because the root of this word [is composed of] only two letters: *beth* and *lamed* [= *b* and *l*], as per the statement, *and confound* (ונבלה) *there* [*their language*] (v. 7). Thus, despite that it says בלל, one of the [two letters] *lamed* [= *l*] does not belong to the root, just like [is the case with roots] שדד, סבב, בזז, and others like those.[24]

I have translated לא יבצר מהם (v. 6) as "nothing [that they desired to do] will be prevented from them," according to the context [Arab. *fī al-maʿanā*]. For the meaning of the word is "to be inaccessible to," and a thing inaccessible is prevented from people. Likewise is the statement [*I know that you can do everything,*] *And that no purpose can be prevented* [לא יבצר] *from you* (Job 42:2).

People disagree with regard to the time when their language was confounded. Some of them maintain that it occurred towards the end of the days of Peleg's life.[25] Others maintain that it occurred at the beginning of his life, which is more likely, since Peleg was called on account of the event, as it is said [*And unto Eber were born two sons; the name of the one was Peleg;*] *for in his days was the earth divided;* [*and his brother's name was Joktan.*] (Gen 10:25). And Joktan was born after that they had been scattered in the world.

Genesis 22:1–2

(v. 1) *And*[26] *after these things,*[27] *God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."*

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24. A similar grammatical explanation is provided by the authors of the the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ and Abū al-Faraj Hārūn). See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 39b.

25. This a is midrashic explanation. See Gen. Rab. 26:3.

26. Hebrew *wa-yehî*. The JPS, as well as other older translations of the MT, follow the KJV with the formula, "And it came to pass." See also, similarly, Yefet.

27. Hebrew *dābār* (pl. *dəbārim*) can mean both "word(s)" and "thing(s)." It is unclear how Yefet understands this expression ("after these things"): after all the events that he lists as having happened to Abraham or "after these words," that is, after all the announcements listed by the exegete in what follows.

And after these things, the Lord of the universe tested Abraham by that he said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am."

(v. 2) *And he said, "Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and [you] go* [Heb. *lǝkh lǝkhā*] *to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall tell you of."*

And he said, "Take your son, your only one, whom you love, namely, Isaac, and you go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall tell you of."

The statement *after these things* (v. 1) is meaningful, for it refers to what God promised twice before to Abraham, may peace be upon him, with regard to Isaac. The first time, before Isaac was born, when he said, *But my covenant will I establish with Isaac* (Gen 17:21). The second time, when he ordered him [= Abraham] to expel Hagar and Ishmael, and said: *In all that Sarah has said to you, hear her voice; for in Isaac shall your seed be called* (Gen 21:12). After a while, and after the announcements, Isaac was born, and Abraham came to conclusion that Isaac would remain after him and occupy his place, and that all the [above-mentioned] promises were related to him [= Isaac]. He [= Abraham] thus announced that to Abimelech and others.[28] The *mudawwin*[29] [Arab. "compiler-editor" or "author-redactor"] is therefore saying that [only] after all these announcements, God said to

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28. Nowhere in the Bible does Abraham explicitly inform Abimelech about Isaac being his successor.

29. On the Karaites' concept of *mudawwin*, see Haggai Ben-Shammai, "On *mudawwin*—the Editor of the Books of the Bible in Judaeo-Arabic Exegesis" [Hebrew], in *Rishonim ve-Achronim: Studies in Jewish History Presented to Avraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph Hacker, Benjamin Z. Kedar, and Joseph Kaplan (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2009), 73–110; Meira Polliack, "Karaite Conception of the Biblical Narrator (*mudawwin*)," in *Encyclopaedia of Midrash*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1:350–74; Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham ibn Ezra* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982), 67–95; Marzena Zawanowska, "Was Moses the *mudawwin* of the Torah? The Question of Authorship of the Pentateuch According to Yefet ben 'Eli," in *Studies in Judaeo-Arabic Culture: Proceedings of the Fourteenth Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, ed. Haggai Ben-Sham-

Abraham:"Take Isaac and offer him [there] as a burnt offering."[30] That is why [the *mudawwin*] opened [Arab. *ṣaddara*][31] with the expression *After these things*.

And his [= the *mudawwin*'s] words *God tested Abraham* (v. 1) with an "and" [conjunctive *vāv*] may be related to what was [ingrained] in Abraham's heart, namely, in his heart [he was convinced that] God's promises would be fulfilled in Isaac. But the Lord of the universe said to him: *take your son* (v. 2), contrary to what [was ingrained] in his heart.

And the statement *God tested Abraham* (v. 1) is a preface [Arab. *ṣadr*][32] which the *mudawwin* introduced before mentioning God's command to Abraham, so as to inform [us] that God's wish concerning this command was for no other reason than to test Abraham, and that his wish was not that Abraham would execute the deed [denoted by the statement] *and offer him there as a burnt offering* (v. 2). Therefore he opened with the statement *God tested Abraham* (v. 1), so that when the reader read, *and offer him there as a burnt offering*, and afterwards he read, *Lay not your hand on the boy* (v. 12), he would know that this statement was neither an abrogation [Arab. *naskh*] [of previous promises], nor a change [of God's mind] [Arab. *bidʿa*], but rather it was [intended] after the manner of a test.[33] The reader

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mai, Aron Dotan, Yoram Erder, and Mordechai A. Freidman (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2014), 7*–35*.

30. Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī also juxtaposes God's order to offer Isaac as a burnt offering with his promise, *for in Isaac shall your seed be called* (Gen 21:12), and he concludes that these (seemingly contradictory) statements were meant to make Abraham's trial complete (Arab. *tamām al-miḥna*), in order to demonstrate "Abraham's superiority [over other people]" (Arab. *li-yaẓhara faḍīlatahu*). See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4529, fol. 47a.

31. This is a methodological comment reflecting Yefet's perception of the Bible as a text consciously and intentionally composed by the author-redactor, or compiler-editor (*al-mudawwin*). The exegete employs the Arabic verb *ṣaddara* not only to denote "preceding," "prefacing," or "opening," but also in the sense of "ordering" and "arranging" literary materials. For more on the term *mudawwin*, see the references above, n. 29.

32. Arabic *ṣadr* ("preface," "opening," or "beginning"), a literary term often used in poetry to describe the first hemistich of a poem, while in prose it denotes a preface, or opening. See above, n. 31.

33. While commenting on this passage, Saʿadia also opposes the idea of abrogation, or God changing his mind, but his line of argument is different, as he states that God is capable of resuscitating Isaac after Abraham's offering of him, in order to keep all his promises to Abraham valid. See Moshe Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Com-*

of the Scripture of God [Arab. *kitāb Allāh*] knows about this. But as for Abraham, may peace be upon him, he did not possess this knowledge—to wit that the order was after the manner of a test—for had he possessed this knowledge, he would have been neither praiseworthy for what occurred to him, nor deserved a reward [for what he executed].[34]

And we must know that God, blessed and supreme, does not need to try people, nor to test them, for he *declares the end from the beginning* (Isa 46:10). Rather, he tested [Abraham] for the sake of the inhabitants of the world throughout the generations. For he, the Almighty and Exalted, knew [in advance] that Abraham would obey him in everything that he would order him, as it is said: *and you found his heart faithful [before you], etc.* (Neh 9:8).[35] So he tested him for the sake of the inhabitants of the world,

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mentary on Genesis [Arabic and Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984), 141. Furthermore, in his *Books of Beliefs and Opinions*, the Gaon, just like Yefet, juxtaposes the two seemingly contradictory verses—*and offer him there as a burnt offering* (Gen 22:2) and *lay not your hand upon the lad* (v. 12)—and says that the latter does not abrogate the former, since the order of God was to hand his son, Isaac, over for an offering ("to reserve his son as a sacrifice"); and when Abraham did so by preparing the fire and the wood and by taking the knife, God told him that it was enough and that he did not want from him anything more than that. See Sa'adia Gaon, *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī 'l-amānāt wa 'l-i'tiqādāt* (*Sefer ha-nivḥar ba-'emunot u-va-de'ot*), ed. and trans. Joseph Qāfiḥ (Jerusalem: Makhon Moshe, 1993), 140 (3:9). For an English translation, see Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 169. Cf. Andrew Rippin, "Sa'adya Gaon and Genesis 22: Aspects of Jewish-Muslim Interaction and Polemic," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies, Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver*, ed. William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 33–46.

34. For more on Yefet's conviction that the righteous are sometimes submitted to trials so that they could be more rewarded in the hereafter, see George Vajda, *Deux commentaires karaïtes sur l'Ecclésiaste*, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 210. For Sa'adia also acknowledging that the trial should increase Abraham's reward, see Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Commentary on Genesis*, 140 [Arabic], 399–400 [Hebrew].

35. A similar argument for God's foreknowledge or his perfect omniscience is found already in Midrash Tanḥuma, whose authors ascertain that God tested Abraham so as to make known to the people of the world that Abraham had been chosen by God not without a reason. See Tanḥ. Vayera 4:46. Similarly, Genesis Rabbah interprets: "*For now I know*—I have made known to all—that thou lovest me, *and thou hast not witheld, etc.*" See Gen. Rab. 56:7. The English translation here follows Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (repr., London:

in order to inform people of [all] the generations about his obedience to God,[36] that they might emulate him and follow in his footsteps, just like Job, may peace be upon him, was tested with respect to his progeny and his property,[37] as well as his own body, that his obedience and the excellence of his perseverance might become evident, that the people [who read of him] might [then] follow in his footsteps and persevere in trials.[38] God also brought about similar things [= afflictions] for his chosen favorites [Arab. *khawāṣṣihi al-mufaḍḍalīn*], that the inhabitants of the world benefit from that [= their example]. In addition, when he tests his beloved friends [or "the holy men"; Arab. *al-awliyā*'],[39] it benefits them [too] in [both] this world and the hereafter.[40]

Soncino, 1961), 1:497. For an English translation of the above cited passage from the Tanḥuma, see John T. Townsend, ed., *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1989), 1:130. For further bibliography see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909–1928), 1:284; 5:252 n. 247. Medieval Bible exegetes generally followed this line of argument. Thus Sa'adia emphasizes that the trial was meant to demonstrate to people Abraham's perfect obedience. See Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Commentary on Genesis*, 140, 399–400. For the Karaite authors of the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, Abū al-Faraj Hārūn) making a similar claim that Abraham's test was meant to demonstrate to people his obedience to God, see MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fols. 279b–280a.

    36. Arabic *ṭā'a* ("obedience"), a term generally designating (in Islam) active obedience, as opposed to passive submission denoted by the term *taslīm*, profusely used in the religious context to indicate unquestionable submission and obedience to God.

    37. Arabic *bi-awlādihi wa-bi-mālihi* (lit. "in his progeny and his property"). The combination of "progeny and property" appears repeatedly in the Qur'an as a synonym for the most precious possessions in this world. See, e.g., Q Al-Kahf 18:46, where it says that "property and progeny are the adornments of life."

    38. The comparison between Abraham and Job was made already in the Midrash. See, e.g., Gen. Rab. 49:9; Tanḥ. Vayera 4:7.

    39. Arabic *al-awliyā*' (lit. "the forefathers"). For the meaning of this term as "exalted saints" or "chosen friends," see Frank, *Search Scripture Well*, 118.

    40. In his comment on Gen 35:22, Yefet expounds: "Scripture records [Jacob's] story (*khabar*), so that we learn that in this world, the righteous are subjected to trials, as it is said *many are the afflictions of the righteous, etc.* (Ps 34:19), and that we ascertain that there is a place of retribution for the righteous, where there will know no suffering. Similarly, God benefits the wicked in this world, and they pass away from the world in prosperity, knowing no adversity, as it is said *They spend their days in wealth, [and in peace they go down to Sheol]* (Job 21:13), but their deeds are undoubtedly kept by God, who will recompense them for them in the hereafter, as it is said about both

But the difference between Abraham and Job was that Job knew that these blows [were after the manner of] a test, as it is said *he will laugh at the trial of the innocent* (Job 9:23), whereas Abraham did not know that it [was merely] a *test*. Accordingly, Job was afflicted without [exercising any free] choice in that [matter]. Rather, the test [described] in his story [Arab. *qiṣṣa*] [consisted of examining] the excellence of his perseverance [in enduring] blows that fell upon him, as well as his [ability to withstand] arguments with people, their slanders, and invectives. And he [= Job] remained firm in his religion, and excelled in his faith.

However, the test of Abraham, may peace be upon him, concerned the matter of order, the fulfilment of which involved [exercising] free choice.[41] And it is the most difficult order for a man [to be demanded] to take his dearest child, especially one like Isaac, and offer it [as a sacrifice] and burn it.

When the *mudawwin* commenced [Arab. *ṣaddara*] explaining what [Abraham] had been ordered [to do by God], stating, *and said to him: "Abraham"* (v. 1), he indicated that [Abraham] was called by [God] and so answered, *Here I am* (v. 1). Next he informed [us] what the Lord of the universe said to [Abraham]: *Take your son, your only one, whom you love* (v. 2).

And it was possible [for God] to say: "Now take Isaac, your son, and offer him there as a burnt offering," but he purposefully added [Arab. *zāda*] the words *your only one, whom you love*, to kindle in Abraham's heart [love] for his child, so that if he had carried out the order, his reward would have been doubled.[42] And it is so that when people give orders to their slaves or their children, they tend to formulate them in the easiest

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[kinds of men] [*God shall judge the righteous and the wicked*], *for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work* (Eccl 3:17)." See MS SP IOS B 217, fol. 50b.

41. According to Muʿtazilite doctrine, all humans are endowed by God with freedom of choice and, consequently, are responsible for their own actions, on account of which they deserve reward and/or punishment. See Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Kalām in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Frank and Oliver Leaman (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 115–48, esp. 119.

42. A similar argument is made by the Karaite authors of the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, Abū al-Faraj Hārūn), who ascertain that the expression *your only son, whom you love* (Gen 22:2) was meant to increase Abraham's trial (Arab. *taʿẓīm al-miḥna*). See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 280a. Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī, in turn, maintains that had there been no doubts engendered by God's order to offer a human being as a sacrifice, both Abraham's obedience to God and his perseverance in the trial would not have been so great. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4529, fol. 46b.

way [possible]. But the Creator, the Almighty [and] Supreme, does with his beloved friends [Arab. *al-awliyāʾ*] as opposed to that, so that if they carried his order out, and persevered, and [despite everything] praised [God], they would deserve his praise, and he would grant them a full reward, above the reward that he would have granted them had he formulated [his command] to them in the easiest way [possible].[43]

And he [= God] called Isaac [Abraham's] *only* [*son*] on the basis of what he said to him: *for in Isaac shall your seed be called* (Gen 21:12).

And when [God] said: *and you go to the land of Moriah*, he ordered him [= Abraham] to go to a place that he would let him know about.[44] He added [Arab. *zāda*] the word "*you*" [Heb. *ləkhā*], meaning by it that Abraham [alone] would go, and nobody [else] would be together with him. Therefore when Abraham approached the land of Moriah, he said to his two young man: *stay here with the donkey; whereas I and the boy* [*will go over there and worship*] (Gen 22:5).

And his [= God's] words *and offer him there as a burnt offering* literally [Arab. *bi-ẓāhir al-qawl*] mean the offering of him [= Isaac] [as] a burnt offering. Abraham had already known the laws of burnt offerings from the ancestors [Arab. *al-qudamā*], as it is said about Noah, *and* [*he*] *offered burnt offerings on the altar* (Gen 8:20).[45]

And his words *on one of the mountains that I shall tell you of* points at two things. First, that he [= God] did not immediately inform him [=

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43. A similar idea was expressed by Saʿadia in his comment on Gen 12:1, where he states that in contrast with people who try to formulate their requests in the easiest way possible, God formulates them in the hardest way possible in order to afterwards increase the believer's reward for having executed the required deed. See Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Commentary on Genesis*, 114 [Arabic], 357 [Hebrew].

44. The authors of the *Talkhīṣ* specify that the land of Moriah is the one known from Solomon's narrative (Arab. *qiṣṣa Shəlomo*), where it is said *on mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared to David* (2 Chr 3:1), whereas the mount of Moriah is a place well known within the land of Moriah. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 280a.

45. This comment alludes to the conception of the antiquity of the commandments (Arab. *qidam al-farḍ*), according to which already the patriarchs were aware of and performed certain commandments, despite living before the revelation of the Torah; knowledge of these commandments was believed to have been transmitted orally until the time of Moses. For more on this subject, see Yoram Erder, "Early Karaite Conceptions about the Commandments Given before the Revelation of the Torah," *PAAJR* 60 (1994): 101–40, and further bibliography there.

Abraham] which mountain from among the mountains it was. Second, that there were numerous mountains in the land of Moriah.

And [the fact that] he said: *that I shall tell you of*, and did not say: "that I will show you," indicates that [God] had already directed to him words [not mentioned here, in the past] [wherein] he informed him which mountain it was. But it is [also] possible that he showed him the glory upon the mountain, and said: "Direct yourself to this mountain, and offer him [= Isaac] there." And [God] ordered him four things: (1)—to take Isaac alone [and no one else], as he said: *take your son*; (2) to go alone, as it is said *and you go to the land of Moriah*; (3) *and offer him there as a burnt offering*; (4) *that I shall tell you of*.

These [first] three orders God wished [Abraham] to fulfill, namely, the taking of Isaac, going alone, and directing himself to the mountain that God had told him of, whereas [his order] *and offer him there as a burnt offering*, God did not wish him [= Abraham] to fulfill, but rather he ordered him [to do] so after the manner of a test.

Now I need to dwell here for a while and explain how God's orders and prohibitions [Arab. *awāmir wa-nawāhī*], as well as his promises and his threats [Arab. *wa'd wa-wa'īd*], are formulated.[46] Thus I will say that they are divided into two types [of expressions]. The first one is a precise (or "clear," "unambiguous") statement [Arab. *qawl muḥkam*]; and the second one is a statement that bears two possible [meanings] [= allows for two possible interpretations].[47]

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46. Arabic *amr wa-nāhī* (pl. *awāmir wa-nawāhī*; "orders and prohibitions"). This is probably a translation of the Hebrew terms denoting positive and negative commandments (עשה ולא תעשה; lit. "you shall," "you shall not"), which connotes the principal religious duty in Islam of commanding what is right or good, and forbidding what is wrong or evil (Arab. *al-ʾamr bi-al-maʿrūf wa-al-nāhī ʿan al-munkar*). It is mentioned several times in the Qur'an (e.g., Q Al-Imran 3:104) and consists of commanding right (Arab. *maʿarūf*; lit. "known," or "familiar," and hence approved), and forbidding wrong (Arab. *munkar*; lit. "unknown," or "unfamiliar," and thus disapproved). In addition, the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil is one of the five principles of the Muʿtazilite doctrine, to which the Karaites generally subscribed. The other four are: God's unity (Arab. *tawḥīd*); God's justice (Arab. *ʿadl*); God's promise and threat (Arab. *al-waʿd wa-al-waʿīd*); and the intermediate state of Muslim sinners (Arab. *al-manzala bayn al-manzalateyn*). See Ben-Shammai, "Kalām in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 118; Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

47. On Yefet's creative adaptation of Islamic hermeneutical terms in this context,

As for the precise [statement], it is [the one] which [God] puts in the context [Arab. *qarīna*][48] indicating that it is a precise [statement]. [For example,] if there is no condition to it, [God] informs [us] that it is unconditional, as he said in [the story about] the flood, *I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake* (Gen 8:21), and [thereby] indicated that this statement had no condition whatsoever. Another example [can be adduced from] what he said to Solomon, *Wisdom and knowledge is granted to you; and I will give you riches, and wealth,* [*and honor*] (2 Chr 1:12), which is an unconditional statement. Had it had any condition, [God] would have explained it, just like he imposed stipulation upon the forefathers [Arab. *al-awliyāʾ*], *if you walk in my statutes,* [*and keep my commandments, and do them*]*, etc.* (Lev 26:3) *then I will give you rain* [*in due season*]*, etc.* (Lev 26:4) till the end of the passage. Likewise, he said, *But if you will not obey me* (Lev 26:14), and the rest of the verse. And similarly [God] said to Solomon, *then I will lengthen your days* (1 Kgs 3:14), under

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see Marzena Zawanowska, "Islamic Exegetical Terms in Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentaries on the Holy Scriptures," *JJS* 64 (2013): 306–25.

48. Arabic *qarīna* ("context"; lit. "proximity"). Islamic tradition distinguishes between two kinds of *qarīna*: verbal or semantic, and circumstantial. Linguistically, the term *qarīna* refers to a verbal or nonverbal element elucidating a part of speech extraneous to itself. The other meaning of the term *qarīna* relates to the circumstances of transmitting a given tradition. These two types of *qarīna* may converge in the same context to define a precise meaning of a certain sentence or word. See Wael B. Hallaq, "Notes on the Term *qarīna* in Islamic Legal Discourse," *JAOS* 108 (1988): 475–80. This exegetical tool, often used by medieval Karaite exegetes, may have been shaped under the influence of the rabbinic principle: דבר הלמד מעניינו ("something learned/proved by the context"; see, e.g., b. Sanh. 86a). It is included as the last principle of the Hillel's seven *middōt* and corresponds to the tenth principle of Ishmael's twelve *middōt*. Thus it seems that the Karaites used the Islamic term to denote a traditional Jewish concept. Indeed, Yefet employs the term *qarīna* in a literary-stylistic sense: to denote an (immediate) narrative context in which given words or expressions appear, and which helps define their meaning within an analysed verse or passage. See Yoram Erder, "The Attitude of the Karaite Yefet ben ʿEli to Moral Issues in Light of his Interpretation of Exodus 3:21–22" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 22 (1999): 313–33, esp. 323–24; Meira Polliack and Eliezer Schlossberg, "Historical-Literary, Rhetorical and Redactional Methods of Interpretation in Yefet ben ʿEli's Introduction to the Minor Prophets," in *Exegesis and Grammar in Medieval Karaite Texts*, ed. Geoffrey Khan, Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–39, esp. 24–25; Zawanowska, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives*, 118 n. 22, and further bibliography there.

the stipulation of obedience, thus making it a conditional promise. And this [promise] that I have mentioned [above] and similar [others], God formulated in a precise statement [Arab. *qawl muḥkam*].

Likewise in the case of [positive] command and prohibition [Arab. *al-amr wa-al-nahy*]. Sometimes [God] explains that they are related to a specific time and not another, or to a specific place and not another, or to a specific person and not another, and informs [people about] its conditional aspect, namely a stipulation that has to be fulfilled. That is the first, precise kind [of statement] [Arab. *al-muḥkam*] of which the worshipers are informed.

The second kind [of statement] that God directs to him [= his worshiper] is an imprecise [or "unspecified," "ambiguous"] statement [Arab. *qawl mursal*], and it bears two possible meanings [= allows for two possible interpretations].

(1) Sometimes God means by this the realization of his words, with no stipulation by him, as he promised the kingdom to Jeroboam son of Nebat, and [subsequently] granted him that, though this promise was not [bound] by covenant and oath (1 Kgs 11:31).

(2) Sometimes there is an [undeclared] condition by God [to the realization of his words], but the worshiper is informed [about it] only afterwards. Of this [kind] is God's statement [directed] to Hezekiah, *for you shall die, and not live* (2 Kgs 20:1; Isa 38:1), [the realization of which] was under the stipulation that he prayed and called [God] [= prayed privately]. Similarly, *Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown* (Jonah 3:4), and many similar [others].

Now we will [return to interpreting the chapter and] say that when [God], may he be praised, promised Abraham and said: *Sarah your wife shall bear you a son indeed; and you shall call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him* (Gen 17:19); and said, *But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, etc.* (Gen 17:21); and said, *For in Isaac shall your seed be called* (Gen 21:12)—he did not put these statements in a context [Arab. *qarīna*] indicating that they were precise statements, with no condition whatsoever. Therefore, when [Abraham] heard God's saying *and offer him there as a burnt offering*, [he thought] it possible that these promises, which [God] had promised him [before], had a condition by God, about which he had not informed him [yet]. At the same time, however, [he thought] it possible that God's words [directed] to him—*and offer him there as a burnt offering*—had no condition, and should of necessity be executed, unless

he permitted him [otherwise]. This conviction [Arab. *i'tiqād*][49] [= the fact that he thought it possible] made him [= Abraham] begin [performing] the deed in a belief that if God's words [directed] to him had a condition, and he [= God] did not wish him [to accomplish] the deed, he would [soon] explain it to him; but if they had no condition by him, he would leave his worshiper [= Abraham] to himself to execute the deed.

Abraham, may peace be upon him, acted in accordance with this assumption [Arab. *fa'ala 'ala hadha al-aṣl*; lit. "followed this principle"]—[namely,] he went being convinced that he would have to offer Isaac, unless God would order him otherwise and inform him [about] the conditional aspect, or the stipulation [involved in this order], provided that it had [any] condition or stipulation. This is a view to which we are disposed [to subscribe], and it is [consistent with] the way [in which] Scripture [expresses itself] [Arab. *maslak al-kitāb*].

As for the obligations that are imposed by reason and the commandments that were revealed through unambiguous statements [Arab. *'ala tarīq al-ta'akīd*], the [biblical] text [Arab. *al-nass*] has already clarified that [both these kinds of commandments] were everlasting obligations.[50]

And as for the commandment [Arab. *farḍ*] related to [a specific] person, it follows [one of] the two principles, which we have mentioned in what preceded.

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49. Arabic *i'tiqād* ("conviction," "belief," "faith," "trust," "confidence"). This should probably be understood here in accordance with Sa'adia's understanding of this term, viz., as a belief or dogma that underwent a speculative process, and only after having become rationally established in believer's mind, it acquired the status of conviction. See Sa'adia Gaon, *Kitāb al-mukhtār fī 'l-amānāt wa-'l-i'tiqādāt*, introduction, par. 4 [Arabic and Hebrew]. For an English translation, see Sa'adia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 14. Compare Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Kalām in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 130.

50. Following the *mu'tazilite* distinction, adapted also by some Rabbanite Jews like Sa'adia, medieval Karaites distinguished between rational (Arab. *'aqlīyya*) and revealed (Arab. *sam'īyya*) commandments. The former, imposed by reason, or "planted" in human consciousness, were generally believed to have existed from time immemorial and therefore there was no need for prophetic revelation about them, whereas there were divergent opinions with regard to the latter which, if not for the revelation, would not have been known to humans. In his comment on Gen 2:17, Yefet ascertains: "What the reason imposes as an obligation is such forever; therefore it needs not be revealed." See MS SP IOS B 051, fols. 125a–b. See also Yoram Erder, "Early Karaite Conceptions about the Commandments Given before the Revelation of the Torah," and further bibliography there.

But another commentator maintains that the statement *God tested* [נסה] *Abraham* (v. 1) [means] that God honored Abraham, may peace be upon him, and he derives [this interpretation] from the verse, *for God is come to honor* [נסות] *you* (Exod 20:16).[51] And about the statement, *and offer him there as a burnt offering* (v. 1), he says that Abraham understood it [= this order] as referring to Isaac, while God, the Almighty and Exalted, [actually] meant by it [= this expression] the lamb, which he [= Abraham] offered. Yet God did not make this clear in his phrase [Arab. *lam yaṣraḥhu* or *yuṣarriḥhu bi-al-'ibāra*], leaving this statement unspecified [Arab. *qawl mursal*], until Abraham took the knife to offer [Isaac], and [only] then he said to him: "My wish was the offering of the lamb, however I did not inform you [about] my wish, in order to demonstrate to the people your obedience."

Another [commentator] says that from his words, *and offer him there as a burnt offering*, Abraham did not learn whether [God] meant Isaac or something else, since he said, *that I shall tell you of*. According to this commentator, his words—*that I shall tell you of*—are not related to [the phrase] *on one of the mountains that I shall tell you of*, but rather they are related to [the phrase] *and offer him there as a burnt offering*. He maintains that Abraham went being convinced that the offering of a sacrifice was necessary. Yet, [he thought] it possible that Isaac would be the sacrifice, but [he thought] it [equally] possible that it would be something else. And when [God] ordered him [= Abraham] to take Isaac alone and go [with him] to the place where he ordered him to offer, and [when he went there and] built the altar, and arranged the wood, and prepared everything he needed [for the offering], and did not see God ordering him to offer something else, but Isaac, he thought that [God] meant Isaac, since neither at first [God] ordered him to take something else, nor when [Abraham] finished [preparing everything] that he needed for the offering, [did] he say to him to offer something else, other than Isaac. Therefore [Abraham] bound him [= Isaac] and took the knife to offer him; and [only then] God informed him that [when he said], *that I shall tell you of*, he meant the lamb [and] nothing else.

Another [commentator] maintains that when God said, *and offer him there [as a burnt offering]*, he referred to Isaac, [and] nothing else. And so

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51. Yefet's understanding of the Hebrew root נסה in the *piel* ("to test") as נישא ("to honor") derives from the midrashic interpretation, reproduced also in Rashi's commentary on Exod 20:17. See, e.g., Gen. Rab. 55:6.

Abraham thought, but God's wish was merely to have him [= Isaac] put on the altar, and he did not want him [= Abraham] to execute his offering and his burning [= of Isaac]. But Abraham, may peace be upon him, acted according to the common [meaning] of the word [Arab. *'ala mashhūr lafẓa*] "burnt offering" and [therefore] he put him [= Isaac] on the altar and begun to offer him. Thereupon God said to him: "Indeed my wish was merely to have him [= Isaac] put on the altar, but I did not explain this to you at the outset, for I wanted your love [for God] and obedience [to him] to become evident."

Another [commentator] maintains that when [God] said, *and offer him there as a burnt offering*, he wished him [= Abraham] [merely] to prepare for the offering. So Abraham prepared the wood and the fire, and he built the altar and arranged the wood, and he bound Isaac and put him on the wood. Next he took the knife in his hand to wait for God's order. Had [God] ordered him to offer [Isaac], he would have offered [him], but if not, he would have abandoned [this idea]. And he [= this commentator] claims that this order resembles [a situation when] a governor orders his scribe to prepare for writing; he [= the scribe] has to prepare the inkwell, and take the paper in his hand, then stretch [the hand] and halt, in order to wait for what [the governor] will command him to write [down].[52]

This is all that has been said about this narrative [Arab. *qiṣṣa*]. The first view we have explained [in detail], since it is the most likely interpretation. But we have cited the [divergent] opinions of sages, at the request of [someone who is] asking to be informed about [different] opinions of people with regard to this account [Arab. *qiṣṣa*]. So we have cited them, but will not occupy [ourselves] with their refutation.

Now, we will return to our subject and conclude that Abraham, may peace be upon him, was convinced that [God's order directed to him] *and offer him there* [*as a burnt offering*] referred to Isaac [and nothing else],

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52. Most likely, Yefet cites here an interpretation provided by the authors of the *Talkhīṣ* (Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, Abū al-Faraj Hārūn), who also compare God's order directed to Abraham to offer Isaac to an order to prepare for writing directed to a scribe, and who maintain that God wished Abraham merely to prepare for a burnt offering by putting Isaac on the altar, upon the wood, taking the knife in his hand—and waiting for further orders. According to the *Talkhīṣ*, the test consisted of checking whether Abraham would be able (Arab. *imtiḥān al-qadr*), or ready and determined (Arab. *ma' al-'azm 'aleyhi*), to offer his son. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:1754, fol. 252a. Cf. Goldstein, *Karaite Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem*, 72, 157.

and that thereby [God] asked him [= Abraham] to offer and burn him [= Isaac], according to the assumptions [Arab. *al-'uṣūl*; lit. "principles"] that we have mentioned [above, in the first explanation]; and that his words, *that I shall tell you of*, referred to the mountain, and not to Isaac.

Further Discussion

Both passages present serious theological and semantic problems with which commentators of all times have had to grapple.

The amazingly compact account of the story of the tower/city of Babel leaves many important details unexplained, among them the paramount question of what was the sin of the builders that made them deserve divine punishment, and it challenges an important religious tenet of the noncorporeal nature of God. Yefet's approach to the former exegetical conundrum is very modern in that he tries to reconstruct the true history behind the text, as well as the history of the text itself, instead of focusing on the story's homiletic aspect, as is the case with earlier commentators. As a result, he many times provides answers not only to questions of who did what, when, where, why, and how, but also ponders the reason why the story was told and included in the Bible in the first place. His innovative answers notwithstanding, the very fact that he asks such questions reveals his unusual historical sensibilities to which we, as modern readers, are highly attuned. As to the latter *crux interpretum* of this story, posed by the implication of divine anthropomorphism, Yefet skillfully enlists his knowledge of linguistics to solve it by referring to the concept of ellipsis, thus offering a palatable stylistic explanation that sounds convincing even today.

The Akedah narrative is undoubtedly one of the most theologically difficult as well as morally disturbing passages in the entire Hebrew Bible, invariably leaving its readers perplexed and distressed. It undermines the traditional conception of the all-benevolent, omniscient, and perfectly just Deity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it puts the "fundamentalist"—uncompromising and blind—faith of Abraham under a question mark. Yefet's treatment of this narrative is marked by scholarly honesty in that he pinpoints and minutely discusses all its puzzling aspects one by one. While doing so, he investigates and assesses a sheer variety of different interpretations—a method, well-known in present day research too, that allows us to better comprehend the full scope of the problems engendered by this pericope.

The main innovativeness of his approach, however, consists of providing a consistent and comprehensive literary analysis of the story, which brings Yefet's reading significantly closer to modern literary approaches to Scripture. This is borne out, inter alia, by how he clearly distinguishes between the figures of the text's author, protagonists, and readers—all of whose diverging perspectives he explores individually, while also closely scrutinizing the story's overall structure as well as its narrative building blocks. He also delves deeply into the stylistic nuances of the text, among other things discussing the idiosyncratic features of divine discourse. With the aid of all these sophisticated literary and linguistic tools Yefet successfully contrives to improve the Creator's image. Nevertheless, his evident admiration for Abraham's obedient response to the divine order to offer his own beloved son—which, in the exegete's view, should serve as an exemplum for future generations of believers—can hardly be considered universally convincing.

Therefore, we may conclude that Yefet's chief contribution to the reception history and exegesis of both sections consists of his systematic engagement with scientific (historical, linguistic, and literary) methods of interpretation. In so doing, he anticipates modern approaches to the Bible; this makes his commentaries interesting not only as a reflection of his own medieval *Sitz im Leben*, but also as a source of valuable—original, insightful, and inspiring—solutions to old cruxes which remain valid for us today.

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Qirqisānī's Exegetical Method and Commentary on Genesis 18:1–22

Nabih Bashir

Introduction: Qirqisānī's Exegetical Method

Like contemporary Muslim and Christian *Kalām* philosophers who belonged to the Muʿtazila movement, the Karaite Yaʿqūb Qirqisānī (first half of the tenth century CE) established the foundations of his exegetical method on reason and logical argumentation. This is to say that the criterion of what is reasonable (Arab. *al-maʿqūl*) serves as the main and basic measure in the exegesis of scriptural verses, in his case the Hebrew Bible. In his words, "The Reasonable is the foundation on which every statement is based and from which knowledge [Arab. *ʿilm*] is derived" (Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Ānwār*, 1:4).[1] There is no contradiction between philosophy and the Hebrew Bible, in his view. On the contrary, one feeds the other and confirms it: religious faith is strengthened through rational thinking and study (1:75); rational thinking and study is a religious obligation (1:66–75, 150–51);[2] and the distinction between right and false is made valid only by thinking, study, and examination (1:73, 108–9). However, we should not conclude from this that reason precedes religious belief, as some of the *Kalām* philosophers contend. Rather, Qirqisānī sees reason as an instrument to establish, nourish, and strengthen belief. Whoever does not adopt this path in the gaining of knowledge will find himself or

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1. Text follows the edition Yaʿqūb Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib—Code of Karaite Law*, ed. Leon Nemoy, 5 vols. (New York: Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1939–1943); all translations are mine.

2. Haggai Ben-Shammai, "The Doctrines of Religious Thought of Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī and Yefet Ben ʿEli," 2 vols. (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977), 1:8–35.

herself relying on tradition and imitation, without any kind of individual or critical thinking.[3]

The main two instruments for study and examination are the innate faculty of discernment (Arab. *al-tamyīz*) and analogical reasoning (Arab. *al-qiyās*), and they can be acquired through rigorous learning. Furthermore, the theoretical-examinational effort of human intellect in Qirqisānī's method "is the only basis for knowing the truth, particularly the religious truth."[4] Qirqisānī rejects the Muʿtazili[5] differentiation between commandments based on reason and commandments based on revelation, which Saʿadia Gaon (a contemporary of Qirqisānī) introduced into Jewish thought. According to this division, the "revelational commandments" are not drawn from reason and cannot be derived or examined logically, whereas "rational commandments" are derived through analogical reasoning. In opposition to this, Qirqisānī argues that what Saʿadia classified as revelational commandments are actually necessities (Arab. *ḍarūrīyatun*), namely, axiomatic foundations (Arab. *ʾuṣūl*), which are at the basis of the so-called rational commandments (Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* 1:86–101). Further, Qirqisānī does not seem to hesitate at all, throughout his code of law (*Kitāb al-Ānwār*), to examine rationally the Karaite as well as the Rabbanite religious laws. And so he says: "We are obliged to apply the (logical and critical) study and examination of the commandments, and we are obliged to accept the outcome of this study and examination in this respect, no matter whether it reflects the Rabbinic or the Karaite opinion" (1:3). Accordingly, he rejects all forms of anthropomorphism (1:15, 31–38, 42), regardless of the fact that he and other major medieval Karaite exegetes generally followed the "literal sense of the text" (Arab. *ẓāhir al-naṣṣ*) as their main exegetical approach.[6]

The following excerpt, from Qirqisānī's exegesis on the beginning of the *parashat Vayera* (וירא, "The Lord Appeared," Gen 18:1–22:24), gives expression to four main exegetical traits that are common in Qirqisānī's work.

First, Qirqisānī makes ample use of the views, opinions, and commentaries found in rabbinic literature. Qirqisānī presents these as legitimate

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3. Hatwig Hirschfeld, *Qirqisani Studies* (London: Jews' College, 1918), 14.

4. Ben-Shammai, "Doctrines," 1:109.

5. See further Marzena Zawanowska's essay in this volume, 49 n. 46 and 52 n. 50.

6. Meira Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 363–415.

opinions and ideas that are not obligatory, thereby omitting the aura of holiness from them.

Second, in accordance with the tendency of Karaite exegetes at large, Qirqisānī uses the method of literary analysis to elucidate the biblical verses as detached from extratextual authority.

Third, Qirqisānī's exegetical approach is philological-historical, sometimes mixed with ideas drawn from the dominant philosophy of his time, Neoplatonism.

Fourth, similarly to other medieval Karaite exegetes, he seeks to avoid and rule out any attempt to denunciate and defame angels, particularly with regard to their sanctity. This is probably because such denunciation may affect the degree of prophecy through which the biblical materials have been conveyed and have come down to us. It is worth noting that this is also the dominant position of the Muslim and Christian *kalām* philosophers who belonged to the Muʿtazila movement during this epoch, and so we see how Qirqisānī fully partakes in the wider intellectual milieu of his time, applying many of its notions to the study and elucidation of the Hebrew Bible.[7]

The Manuscripts

Qirqisānī's exegesis of *parashat Vayera* (Gen 18:1–33) appears in two different manuscripts, but only one (Yevr.-Arab. 1:4529, marked as A) contains the whole exegesis, whereas the other (Yevr.-Arab. 1:3198, marked as B) contains only part of it and suffers many omissions. There are no exegetical differences between the two manuscripts; therefore, I chose not to include an apparatus. Our main exegetical section appears in manuscript B (seventeen folios altogether) only in two folios (39v and 40v, where folio 40r is missing). Manuscript A, containing 104 folios, is part of Qirqisānī's commentary on Genesis (also known as *Kitāb al-Riyāḍ wal-Ḥadāʾiq, Book of Parks and Gardens*; henceforth *Riyāḍ*). The exegesis of *parashat Vayera* starts in 36v and continues to 38v.

Please note: in the following, texts that appear in round brackets are added by me in order to complete the translation, whereas what appears in square brackets, while also my additions, refers to the biblical source or

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7. See my "A Reexamination of Saadya Gaon's Dictum 'Humankind Is More Sublime Than Angels'" [Hebrew], *Ginzei Qedem* 14 (2018): 9–54.

completes the biblical verse. The English translations of the MT biblical
verses are based on the 2009 JPS translation.

English Translation of Qirqisānī's Commentary on *Parashat Vayera*

And the Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre
[Gen 18:1]

In this section you were informed that God has appeared to Abraham
and manifested himself onto him[8] at this place (called) the terebinths of
Mamre. And as it was argued, this place (is located) in southern Jerusalem,
near the tombs of the fathers, peace and mercy be upon them (= Hebron).
And Mamre is one of the three men, as Scripture tells, who was one of the
allies of Abraham, peace be upon him. Hence, it was told, "Now he dwelt
by the terebinths of Mamre the Amorite brother of Eshkol, and brother of
Aner; and these were confederate with Abram" [Gen 14:13]. And regard-
ing the verse "And the Lord appeared unto him" and the verse "and he
lifted up his eyes" and so on, if one might ask whether the meaning of
the word "appeared" is what has been expounded later in the follow-up
story of the three men, or rather, there is another meaning for the word.
After all, people differed on this subject. Some of them were of the opinion
that every story of both stories is different from the other,[9] because God
revealed to him (to Abraham) from what he had expounded (later) regard-
ing this topic. So, when Abraham lifted up his eyes toward those three
men and saw them, he said to God: "if it please you, do not go on past
your servant" [Gen 18:3]. That is to say, he asked God for the appointed
time to forbear him until he does his duties toward them, since he was
fully aware of their excellency and uprightness and that they are angels of
God. Therefore, he approached and asked them: "Let now a little water be
fetched" [Gen 18:4]. Others were of the opinion that both of the stories are
just one[10] and that whereas he said "and the Lord appeared unto him," he
expounded and illustrated this in a way that this revelation and appear-

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8. It seems that Qirqisānī follows R. Issi in this matter (Gen. Rab. 48:3, Soncino
ed. 407). On the other hand, Saʿadia Gaon uses only the verb "revealed" (*tajallā*) as a
translation-elucidation for the Biblical Hebrew verb "appeared" (*yera*).

9. Qirqisānī might be referring here to some of the sages, the Midrash, and Saʿadia
Gaon, who adopted this exegesis. For example, see b. Shabb. 127a.

10. See b. Shabb. 127a; Gen. Rab. 48:4 (Soncino ed. 407).

ance was his dispatch of those three men to him, who stood over against him. So, he (Abraham) ran to meet them and bowed down. This is evident from the verse "he ran to meet them" [Gen 18:2] that precedes the verse "do not go on past your servant." This disproves the first exegesis. And if someone refers to the verse "do not go past"[11] and argues that it is in the singular form, although they were three, we reply to him that it is possible that he approached one of the three, because it said "wash [your feet, and recline under the tree]" [Gen 18:4–5]. And if someone asks and says about the verses calling them "men" [Gen 18:2], and later on calling them "the Lord" [Gen 18:13–14]: Therefore, it must be rather a creator or created being. If he was a created being, then how is it possible that the created got the same name of the worshiped? And if he was a creator, then how is it possible that a human being could see him? Beginning so, we say that the angels and the prophets could approach humans in some instances on behalf of the Creator, may his glory be exalted, while their sayings are being said in their names; but the intention is to speak on behalf of the Creator, may he be glorified and exalted. We have already expounded this in the response to Binyāmīn's[12] argument regarding the angel in the book focusing on religious obligations.[13] For example, the angel approaching Hagar stated: "I will greatly multiply your seed" [Gen 16:10],[14] not that the angel really will do this, but God will greatly multiply her seed.

Furthermore, Moses approaching the people of Israel declared: "that I will give the rain of your land" [Deut 11:14]. This speech is on behalf of God, and the meaning is not that Moses will really do this. There are various similar examples in this regard we have already mentioned there.[15] And, in a similar way, the angel approaching Moses from the fire of the bush: "I am the God of your father" [Exod 3:6]. He is not the God of his father, rather this verse was reported on behalf of the Creator, may his

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11. Manuscript B begins here.

12. Binyāmīn is the eminent proto-Karaite scholar Benjamin al-Nahāwandī (originally from Nahāwand, Persia, first half of the ninth century). He became very famous for adopting the theory of an "angel creator." Elsewhere I argue that this theory was not his but was widespread among some Jewish, Christian, and Muslim cults and sects. See Nabih Bashir, "Angels in the Theology and Exegeses of Saadya Gaon: Human Being as the Purpose of Creation" [Hebrew] (PhD diss, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2015).

13. Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* 1:55; 2:319.

14. Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* 2:319–21.

15. Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* 2:319.

glory be exalted. As has been said here: "and the Lord appeared unto him," and the seeing indicates someone has been seen and someone who saw, then the verse "and he lifted up his eyes" necessitates the verse "and looked." This is another indication that the two stories are one and that the second story came to expound and illustrate the first one. Regarding Abraham, it has been told that he saw twice: in the first [instance] it was written, "and he lifted up his eyes and looked"; and in the second, "and when he saw them he ran to meet them." It is possible also that the first verse, "and looked," indicates that he saw persons whom he could not know who they were; and the second look indicates that Abraham examined and knew that they were angels. Further, by naming them "men," he meant that they were in the image of humans, just like the saying: "And six men entered by way of the upper gate" [Ezek 9:2], regardless of the fact that they were not men, rather they were angels in the form of humans. Similarly, the saying: "the man Gabriel" [Dan 9:21]; and the telling of Manoah's wife: "the man has appeared to me" [Judg 13:10]. Therefore, the usage of "the Lord" [Gen 18:1] must be elucidated in the same way we just mentioned above. That is, if an angel was allowed to approach humans in such a way, then the prophet was also allowed to approach them in a way that his speech apparently seemed that he is talking for himself, but in fact the speech refers to God; and then they (= angels and prophets) were allowed to approach humans on behalf of God, even though it seems that they speak for themselves. In addition, we should not deny that an angel could have the name of the Lord. We already expounded this matter somewhere else.[16] And, if someone is asking: if in fact the three men were angels, then how is it possible that angels eat and drink? For it was said after all: "and set these before them; and he waited on them under the tree as they ate" [Gen 18:8]; and from the beginning of the story Abraham approaches them: "And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves" [Gen 18:5]? In addition, if Abraham knew that they were angels, is it (logically) permissible for him that angels eat? If it is (logically) permissible that spiritual angels eat food, then it necessitates that they defecate, hence they could be filthy and impure, and this assumes lots of things that are not possibly committed by the pure and holy spiritual beings.

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16. See Ben-Shammai, "Doctrines," 1:238; 2:61, lines 31–32; Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār* 1:178.

Hence, we say that people hold many different views in this respect. Some have the opinion that they were not angels but humans[17] and that Abraham recognized that they were trusted prophets. So, when he saw them, he dedicated himself to them and ran to meet them and bowed down to them as a sign of admiration and glorification. They [some commentators] further said: If someone denies this by saying that which human lived in that age that was more splendid than him (= Abraham)?

Then, we reply to him that Shem was a righteous prophet and Eber too was a prophet, and we have shown that he [Abraham] was a prophet. In addition, Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham and to whom Abraham gave a tithe, lived in that age. And nobody denies also that some other prophets lived in that age. They added that when Abraham saw them and recognized them, and they stood over against him—for the verse says, "stood over him"—then he knew that they were approaching him and he approached the most splendid of them in his speech: "My lord, if now I have found favor in your eyes" [Gen 18:3], which means "my sir," and later he approached them all at once in the saying: "and wash your feet" and the rest of the verses. He approached them by saying: "Let now a little water be fetched," because whoever goes a long way by foot and wants to relax used to wash his feet, hide in the shade, and lean back.

Then, Scripture follows that up by mentioning the food as an example of what must be offered to guests, and then they complied with his offer. On the other hand, those who argue that they were angels explain that the saying "and they ate" should not be understood in its original meaning, but that it refers to consumption, just as the verse "and you shall consume [Heb. lit. "eat"] all the peoples" [Deut 7:16], which means to extinguish. They further said that the angels pretended to Abraham that they were eating, but in fact they were not.[18] Whoever holds such a view seems as someone who escaped from a bad thing but was caught by another worse thing, yet was not saved from the thing that he fled from.[19] This is because

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17. See, for example, Eliyahu Ki Tov, *Sefer ha-Parshiyot: Divre hakhamim Ris-honim ve-Ahronim ʿal Parashat ha-Shavuʿa—Bereshit* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Eli-yahu Ki Tov, 1983), 293.

18. Some sages, the Midrash, Philo, Flavius Josephus, Saʿadia Gaon, and others hold such opinions. They are mentioned without attribution by way of indirect polemics.

19. It is likely that here Qirqisānī criticizes Saʿadia, who adopts such an opin-ion. See Moshe Zucker, ed. and trans., *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984), 124 for Judeo-Arabic, 375–77 for

that Abraham offered food to them indicates that he was of the opinion
that they could eat; otherwise, it would be impossible for him to offer
food and invite them to a thing that is impossible for them to comply
with. Therefore, his approaching them: "that you may refresh yourselves,"
and their approaching him: "Do as you have said" [Gen 18:5], indicate
that eating food is not impossible for them but, rather, it is possible for
them. And it is even more amazing to discover that they were not really
eating, but it was only an illusion and imagination. [Whoever holds such
a view] attributed to the angels deception, that Abraham could not know
that they deceived him, and this caused him to misapprehend the thing as
different from what it really was. Others are of the opinion that the angels,
who are animated, speech-enabled,[20] and rational beings, when almighty
God is willing to send one of them towards the creatures, he dresses the
angel in a terrestrial body that gravitates him down, and sends him to one
of his prophets.

After fulfilling his mission, God takes off the terrestrial body from
the angel, and after it was taken off, he [the angel] becomes an entity with
a nature of the celestial body on his way towards heaven, and when he
gets there he [God] takes off his heavenly body and gets the soul and the
mind and ends up in the world of the intellect.[21] This way of examina-
tion is the way of the philosophers: examining the descending of the soul
and the intellect together towards the physical world, their dressing the
body,[22] their using nature until they get all the benefits; and then they
ascend towards the world of the intellect. If it is so, then there is no need

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Hebrew; for an English translation, see Michael Linetsky, ed. and trans., *Rabbi Saadiah
Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2002),
271. Sa'adia's commentary is based on R. Meir's opinion (Gen. Rab. 48:4, Soncino ed.
414–15).

20. The term *al-nuṭq* basically means "articulated speech," but conceptually it
always has the meaning of "rational" or "endowed with reason." However, in our con-
text it is more accurate that the author meant the basic meaning, because he added
after it "rational."

21. In the manuscript: *min ʿālam al-ʿaql* (*from* the world of the intellect), the
correction based on the entry "Khālūsā"; see Joshua Blau, *A Dictionary of Mediaeval
Judaeo-Arabic Texts* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humani-
ties, 2006), 189.

22. The author of *Kitāb Maʿānī al-Nafs*, which is wrongly attributed to Ibn Paquda,
mentions the idea of the angels dressing in terrestrial bodies, such as do the soul and
the intellect, when they go down toward the earth, whereas they take off their terres-

to deny that, when an angel is sent to the terrestrial world, God composes in him a limb for using in eating and feeding. This is necessary in order to be able to eat and drink by what he was dressed of before his descending toward the terrestrial world. In other words, he wears two bodies: a celestial body, and a terrestrial body gravitating him down.

This terrestrial body could digest all the food that the angel eats and expel it without need of defecating and of filth. However, one of our sages said in this respect things without bringing solid proof, leading to that one of the three was an angel, the other two were humans, and Abraham approached in the first place the angel: "My lord, if now I have found favor in your eyes," and in this regard it was said: "and the Lord appeared unto him." He meant that God appeared to him [to Abraham] in the sense that God has sent to him this angel, after Abraham asked him: "do not pass," and he approached the two others who were humans, and said to them: "Let now a little water be fetched," and the rest of the things, until they approached him: "so do," and they were [those] who ate without the third. Afterwards, the two asked him: "Where is Sarah your wife?" and when he answered: "There, in the tent" [Gen 18:9], the third one, the angel, approached him: "I will certainly return to you when the season cometh round" [Gen 18:10]. This is the same one who approached Abraham: "And the Lord said unto Abraham: 'Why did Sarah laugh, saying…'" [Gen 18:13]. Do you not see how Scripture distinguishes between the speech in plural form and the speech in singular form? When it uses the singular form, it uses "Lord"; when it uses the plural form, it does not use [Lord]. Then, it delayed this use by notifying that the other two went to Sodom, and that the angel was left behind; about him was said, "And the Lord said: 'Shall I hide from Abraham'" [Gen 18:17]. Therefore, it was said: "but Abraham was still standing before the Lord" [Gen 18:22]. This exegete says: Scripture supervenes the angel together with them, and the angel got the same name of them (= men), as it said: "three men," just as said above: "six men" [Ezek 9:2]. This is also similar to what was said regarding Joshua: "[Joshua] … looked up and saw a man standing before him" [Josh 5:13], with Scripture notifying that he is a "captain of the host of the Lord" [Josh 5:14]. We have already said that there are many more similar examples.

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trial bodies when they ascend toward heaven. See Ignác Goldziher, ed., *Kitab Ma'ani al-Nafs* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1907), 59.

Discussion: Qirqisānī in His Context

The manifestation of God, as formulated in Gen 18, includes many textual, linguistic, and theological difficulties. In addition, such a manifestation appears unnecessary. It is not vital at all and adds no value or significance beyond the manifestation of the angels. In vain we search in the literature of the sages for any convincing interpretation for such a manifestation.

One of the rules of the biblical hermeneutics that the sages used to deal with such difficulties is *tiqqun soferim*, literally, "scribal corrections."[23] The *soferim* are the Jewish scholars/scribes of the postbiblical era. Occasionally, they emended biblical phrases to avoid expressions which could appear irreverent or inappropriate and to fix or overcome such difficulties.

For example, we read, "The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD" (Gen 18:22), whereas earlier we read something different: "And the men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off" (Gen 18:16). The former verse implies that Abraham was still at the same place, but according to the latter Abraham accompanies the angels some distance! Therefore, it appears that the Lord really was still standing "before" Abraham, since he is omnipresent; but, as it would be derogatory to his honor to say that he was standing before Abraham, as an inferior before his superior, it is reversed, as we are told by R. Simon: "This is an emendation of *Soferim*, for the *Shechinah* was actually waiting for Abraham" (Gen. Rab. 49:7 [Soncino ed. 425–26]).[24]

Sa'adia Gaon includes in his commentary the following unconvincing traditional interpretation: the purpose of the manifestation of God by himself in this chapter is to tell Abraham that "the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great." However, he adds the following as his own interpretation:

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23. See W. Emery Barnes, "Ancient Corrections in the Text of the Old Testament (*Tikkun Sopherim*)," *JTS* 1 (1900): 387–414; Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1981); Moshe Zipor, *Tradition and Transmission: Studies in Ancient Biblical Translation and Interpretation* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hamecuhad Publishing House), 2001.

24. See also Gen. Rab. 49:7 in Theodor-Alback's edition, 2:505–7 (Hebrew) and n. 4 therein; and William G. Braude, trans. *The Midrash on Psalms*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:251, on Ps 18:26.

> Now it mentions the appearance of light before the passing of the individuals so that Abraham be certain that they are allies of God. Likewise, the purpose of the appearance of light (the manifestation of God in Sa'adia's terms) for the prophets is for them to be certain that what they hear is the words of God […] Abraham says to them: "God, if I have found favor with you," with a concealment/ellipsis [*iḍmār*] of the word "allies" of God. This error, [i.e.,] that he thought that they are men, is all through [the story] because of how minimal the distinction is between prophets and angels.

As we can see, Sa'adia uses here a different hermeneutical rule, the rule of concealment/ellipsis (*iḍmār*). By this he implies that the biblical text lacks some vital words, so that it is less comprehensible. In addition, in the context of the revelation, he attributes an error to Abraham.

It seems that one of the main purposes of Qirqisānī's commentary on Gen 18 is to advance a polemic against the widespread conception in rabbinic tradition that "but Abraham remained standing before the Lᴏʀᴅ" (v. 22), as one of eighteen emendations of the scribes, "corrects" an original text that read, "but the Lᴏʀᴅ remained standing before Abraham" (*Kitāb al-Ānwār* 1:154).[25] In addition, Qirqisānī deals with some textual and theological difficulties by arguing that the verse "And the Lᴏʀᴅ said: 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do'" (Gen 18:17) belongs to an altogether different story (1:155). The same argument can be found in ancient Jewish Hellenistic commentaries, mainly in Philo and Josephus (see Philo, *QG* 4.1–20; *Abr.* 133–146; Josephus, *A.J.* 11.196–200), and in later commentaries such as Maimonides, who attributes to Rabbi Hiyya (the Great, d. 230 CE) the second interpretation that Qirqisānī adopts here (see above) and views it as the best interpretation.[26]

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25. Qirqisānī explicitly presents and discusses the topic of the eighteen emendations of the scribes (Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Ānwār* 1:144–161). In addition, Qirqisānī accuses the Rabbanites of claiming that the Hebrew MT was written by Ezra "the scribe" (Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Ānwār* 1:15, 149–150).

26. "One of the sages, may their memory be blessed … arrived at this great principle. It was Rabbi Hiyya the Great, when speaking of the text of the Torah: 'And the Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre, and so on' (Gen 18:1). For after he had first propounded the proposition that God manifested Himself to him, he began to explain what the form of this manifestation was; and he said that at first he saw 'three men' and ran … He who propounded this allegoric interpretation says of Abraham's dictum—'And he said: My lord, if I now have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant'—that it too is a description of what he said in a vision of prophecy to one of them; he says in fact: 'He said it to the greatest

The church fathers used Gen 18 to strengthen the doctrine of the Trinity (e.g., Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 56.1–10).[27] It seems that Qirqisānī emphasizes that the three men actually ate and that the verse "And the Lᴏʀᴅ said: 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I shall do?'" belongs to a separate story, thereby weakening such Trinity-oriented interpretations. And yet, it can still be argued that if spiritual entities such as angels can be manifested and descend towards the physical world by being dressed in a terrestrial body, so to speak, including eating, therefore the same could be said about God's incarnation, as orthodox Christian doctrine tells us. In other words, Qirqisānī's interpretation of Gen 18 cannot in fact weaken Trinitarian interpretations. But, on the other hand, he guarantees three issues that are crucial for him as a Karaite exegete: safeguarding the accuracy of the biblical text; adhering to what he understands as the literal interpretation of the text; and removing the error that the Rabbanites attribute to Abraham, who at first thought the three angels were humans.

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among them.' Understand this story too, for it is one of the secrets […] This is quite similar to the story concerning Abraham, in which it at first informs us in a general way, 'And the Lord appeared unto him, and so on,' and then begins to explain in what way this happened" (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962], 2.42, p. 389). It should be noticed that this interpretation that Maimonides attributes to Rabbi Hiyya is not found in any printed editions of Genesis Rabbah, including the English Soncino translation (Gen. Rab. 48:10, p. 411), Theodor-Albeck's Hebrew edition, and the edition with the *Matnot Kehunah* (Jerusalem: Levin-Epstein, 1977), 1:55. In addition, the Islamic conception of God's manifestation is much closer to the conception presented here by Qirqisānī (see, for example, Q Hud 11:69; Ad-Dhariyat 51:24–30).

27. Saʿadia was fully aware of such use and tried to refute it. See Saʿadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, 2:6.

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Sa'adia Gaon's Translation of the
Torah and Its Coptic Readers

Ronny Vollandt

Sa'adia's Judeo-Arabic translation of the Torah is not only one of the most influential texts in Judeo-Arabic culture but also among the best-known Arabic versions of the Bible. The frequent attestation of his translation in the Cairo Genizah shows that the Tafsīr, the name by which it became known, acquired an authoritative, even canonical, status among all Arabic-speaking Rabbanite communities. Soon after its creation, the Tafsīr could be found in communities throughout the Near East, North Africa, and Muslim Spain. But the Tafsīr did not only have Jewish readers; it was also read and transmitted by Samaritan, Muslim, and Christian scholars in the Middle Ages.[1] The source text that I present below appears to have been the written documentation of a series of regular meetings between a Jew, Abū al-Majd ibn Abī Manṣūr ibn Abī al-Faraj al-Isrā'īlī, who has been identified as the ḥazan and treasurer of the Babylonian congregation of Old Cairo at the time of the Nagid Abraham ben Maimon (1186–1237), and one of the leading Coptic scholars of that time, al-As'ad Abūl-Faraj Hibat Allāh ibn al-'Assāl.

The Text

The source presented here is from a preface found at the start of two Coptic manuscripts of the Tafsīr: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Ar. 1; and Cairo, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, MS Bibl. 32.[2] Both of these

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1. Tamar Zewi, *The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch: Critical Edition and Study of MS London BL OR7562 and Related MSS*, Biblia Arabica 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). See also Ronny Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 88–89, 105–8, 243.

2. The text has been published in Ronny Vollandt, "Flawed Biblical Translations into Arabic and How to Correct Them: A Copt and a Jew Study Saadiah's Tafsīr,"

are dated to the last decade of the sixteenth century, stem from the same workshop, and were copied from the same archetype that goes back to an original written more than three centuries earlier by al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl, more than three hundred years after Saʿadia. It recounts how al-Asʿad invited Abū al-Majd, a distinguished member of the Jewish community of Old Cairo and someone with whom he had obviously established a personal relationship, to help him copy a manuscript as accurately as possible and establish the correct transmitted text of the Tafsīr.

So, in the month of Shawwāl of 1242 CE, the two scholars sat facing each other and studied the text jointly. As the preface relates, each held his own copy of the Tafsīr. But while the Copt referred to a manuscript of Saʿadia's translation written in Arabic script, elaborating on its contents and characteristic features, the Jew read aloud from a manuscript that contained the same Arabic text in Hebrew letters. The Copt duly noted all textual variants between the two versions on his own copy, and incorporated his collaborator's explanations in the form of a sophisticated interlinear apparatus as well as marginal glosses.

The Context

Al-Asʿad ibn al-ʿAssāl had a vivid interest in Jewish texts. For example, he and his brother Muʾtaman are known to have read Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-ḥāʾirīn*).[3] They belonged to the ʿAssālids, one of those distinguished families (*buyūtāt*) who, often over several generations, attained high positions in the civil service and also ecclesiastical prominence, and exerted a profound influence on the internal affairs of the Coptic community.[4] The Arabic-language works by members of the

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in *Studies on Arabic Christianity in Honor of Sidney H. Griffith*, ed. David Bertaina, Sandra T. Keating, Mark N. Swanson, and Alexander Treiger (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 56–90.

3. As shown by Gregor Schwarb, "The Reception of Maimonides in Christian-Arabic Literature" [Hebrew], in *Maimonides and His World*, vol. 7 of *Ben ʿEver le-ʿArav: Contacts between Arabic Literature and Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages and Modern Times*, ed. Yosef Tobi (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2014), 109–75; Schwarb, "Die Rezeption Maimonides' in der christlich-arabischen Literatur," *Judaica* 63 (2007): 1–45.

4. On these, see Adel Sidarus, "Families of Coptic Dignitaries (*buyūtāt*) under the Ayyūbids and the Golden Age of Coptic Arabic Literature (Thirteenth Century)," *JCoptS* 15 (2013): 189–208.

al-'Assāl family on jurisprudence, canon law, theology, philosophy, and linguistics were marked by a universalism of sources with a great intellectual openness, irrespective of their religious provenance. Al-As'ad's father was a high-ranking government official; one of his brothers, al-Amjad Abū al-Majd ibn al-'Assāl (d. after 1270), was secretary to the *diwan* of the army. Al-Amjad's position required him to travel back and forth between Cairo and Damascus, which ensured a steady influx of books not previously available in Egypt, notably those by East and West Syriac and Melkite authors.[5] These books laid the foundations for the most famous book collection of the time, known as *al-khizāna al-amjadiyya*.

Al-Amjad and his three brothers, al-As'ad Abūl-Faraj Hibat Allāh ibn al-'Assāl (d. before 1259), al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl (d. ca. 1265), and Mu'taman al-Dawla Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-'Assāl (d. after 1270), all of whom he supported, appear to have been the nucleus of a close-knit scholarly network.[6] Georg Graf described them as "the center of the literary Golden Age of the Copts in the thirteenth century."[7] In their linguistic and exegetical endeavors, the members of this circle interacted with one another and shared a similar approach. Not much is known about Ibn Kātib Qayṣar ("the son of the secretary of Qayṣar," that is, of the Seljuk Amir 'Alam al-Dīn Qayṣar, d. ca. 1260), a related figure in the circle, who excelled in theology and in biblical commentaries and translations.[8] Another member of the circle was Abū al-Shākir ibn al-Rāhib (fl. ca. 1250), whose father, al-Sanā Abū al-Majd Buṭrus b. al-Muhadhdhib Abū al-Faraj al-Thu'bān al-Rāhib,

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5. Awad Wadī', *Dirāsa ʿan al-Muʾtaman b. al-ʿAssāl wa-kitābihi "Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn" wa-taḥqīqihi* (Cairo: Franciscan Printing Press, 1997), 66 n. 73.

6. To be precise, al-As'ad and al-Ṣafī had the same mother. Mu'taman was their half-brother, born after their father's second marriage. The most recent and comprehensive introduction on the 'Assālids is Wadī', *Dirāsa ʿan al-Muʾtaman*. See also Georg Graf, "Die koptische Gelehrtenfamilie der Aulād al-ʿAssāl und ihr Schrifttum," *Or* 1 (1932): 34–56, 129–48, 193–204; Alexis Mallon, "Une école de savants égyptiens au Moyen-Âge," *MFOB* 1 (1906): 109–31; 2 (1907): 213–64; Mallon, "Ibn al-'Assāl: Les trois écrivains de ce nom," *JA* 5 (1905): 509–29. On al-As'ad's critical edition of the Arabic gospels in use among the Copts and its apparatus, see below.

7. Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols. (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), 2:387.

8. On Ibn Kātib Qayṣar, see Mark N. Swanson, "Ibn Kātib Qayṣar," in *Christian-Muslim Relations 600–1500*, ed. David Thomas, http://doi.org/10.1163/1877-8054_cmri_COM_25670; Stephen J. Davis, "Introducing an Arabic Commentary on the Apocalypse: Ibn Kātib Qayṣar on Revelation," *HTR* 101 (2008): 77–96.

had been the preceptor of the ʿAssālid brothers. An encyclopedist in his scholarly production, Abū al-Shākir distinguished himself as a theologian and the author of linguistic treatises, and composed a *Kitāb al-Tawārīkh* (*Book of History*).[9] This work was a major source for another Copto-Arabic historical treatise, the universal chronicle by Jirjis b. al-ʿAmīd b. al-Makīn (1205–1273), *al-Majmūʿ al-mubārak* (*The Blessed Collection*).

Participants in this scholarly circle, who showed great interest in Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, also read and frequently quoted another work of Jewish provenance—Sefer Joseph b. Gurion, a medieval historiographical compilation in Hebrew that later came to be known as Sefer Josippon.[10] Composed anonymously in southern Italy in the first half of the tenth century, it was soon translated into Arabic. The translation initially circulated in Hebrew letters, but it was later copied into Arabic script, which facilitated its dissemination beyond the Jewish community.

However, the most popular Jewish text among medieval Copts remained Saʿadia's Judeo-Arabic translation of the Torah, the Tafsīr. Coptic copies of the Tafsīr, transcribed into Arabic script, appeared at the very start of the Ayyubid period and soon supplanted Arabic versions of the Pentateuch translated directly from the Coptic-Bohairic.[11] It seems that the ʿAssālids actively promoted the inclusion of Saʿadia's Tafsīr in their studies. For example, the earliest extant Coptic manuscript of the Tafsīr (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Or. 112) was copied by

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9. See Samuel Moawad, ed., *Chapters 1–47, Critical Edition with Introduction* [Arabic], vol. 1 of *Abū Shākir ibn al-Rāhib: Kitāb al-Tawārīkh* (Cairo: Alexandria School, 2016). The work has three parts: the first on calendar reckoning, astronomy, and chronography; the second on civil and ecclesiastic history, beginning with biblical history; and the third on the history of councils. A brief version of the work has become known by the title *Chronicon Orientale*. On the long debates about its authorship, see Adel Sidarus, *Ibn ar-Rāhibs Leben und Werk: Ein koptisch-arabischer Enzyklopädist des 7./13. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz, 1975), 41–45; Adel Sidarus, "Copto-Arabic Universal Chronography: Between Antiquity, Judaism, Christianity and Islam," *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 2 (2014): 221–50.

10. See Ronny Vollandt, "Ancient Jewish Historiography in Arabic Garb: *Sefer Josippon* between South Italy and Coptic Cairo," *Zutot* 11 (2014): 70–80.

11. See the remarks of Ofer Livne-Kafri, "Appendix II: Some Notes concerning the Arabic Version," in *Topics in Coptic Syntax: Structural Studies in the Bohairic Dialect*, ed. Ariel Shisha-Halevy (Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 685–94; Ofer Livne-Kafri, "A Note on the Energicus in a Coptic-Arabic Translation of the Pentateuch," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 62 (2009): 405–11.

"the monk Gabriel"[12] who, before his elevation to patriarch of the Church of Alexandria as Gabriel III, had been the preceptor of al-Amjad and a secretary to the al-'Assāl family. He accompanied al-Amjad and his brothers during their travels to Damascus in search of manuscripts, transcribing many texts composed by them or important for their literary work. Another early Coptic manuscript of the Tafsīr (Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, MS Mxt. 664) was in al-Amjad's personal library, the abovementioned *al-khizāna al-amjadiyya*.

There are indications that the adoption of Sa'adia's Tafsīr into Christian canons happened progressively. The oldest attested Christian manuscript containing Sa'adia's translation is London, British Library, MS Add. 11855 (AM 740/1024 CE), in a group of early manuscripts of West Syriac provenance. However, these manuscripts only feature Sa'adia's translation of Genesis: the other manuscripts represent translations from the Peshitta (Exodus and Numbers) and the Syro-Hexapla (Leviticus and Deuteronomy).[13]

The only Christian manuscripts in Arabic script that contain a full set of pentateuchal books from Sa'adia's Tafsīr were produced by Coptic scribes. Indeed, it would appear that the text was already available to Coptic scholars some time before the Coptic-Bohairic Pentateuch was rendered into Arabic, since the Arabic translation of the latter exhibits a striking similarity to Sa'adia's text. Moreover, the Tafsīr can be found in a large number of copies from the first half of the thirteenth century onwards, and its transmission among Coptic communities is complex, with textual witnesses branching out in a number of different manuscript types, which can be referred to as (1) the basic type, (2) the revised type, and (3) the extended type.

(1) The first, most basic type of manuscript containing the Tafsīr takes the form of a running translation, without additions. We may assume that this type antedated the revised and extended types, not only because this is indicated by those manuscripts that have been dated, but also since it is implied by the textual basis itself. Codices of this type usually make explicit

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12. As pointed out by Berend Jan Dikken, "Some Remarks about Middle Arabic and Sa'adya Gaon's Arabic Translation of the Pentateuch in Manuscripts of Jewish, Samaritan, Coptic Christian, and Muslim Provenance," in *Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic: Diachrony and Synchrony*, ed. Liesbeth Zack and Arie Schippers (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 71–72.

13. On the relevant manuscripts, see Vollandt, *Arabic Versions*, 222–29.

that the text contained in it is "accurately copied from the translation of Saʿīd al-Fayyūmī [= Saʿadia Gaon], from Hebrew into Arabic" (Arab. *muḥarrara min naql Saʿīd al-Fayyūmī min al-ʿibrāni ilā al-ʿarabī*).[14] Despite this claim of accuracy, however, the text included in these manuscripts exhibits some fairly significant revisions that allow us to speak of a distinct Coptic adaptation. A particularly obvious example is that the chapter division follows the Coptic tradition, although in addition it retains an indication of the weekly Hebrew *parashōt*.[15] The earliest dated manuscript of this type is Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Or. 112, copied in 1245/46 CE.[16]

(2) A revised version of the Tafsīr is based on the earlier basic type. It is represented in copies of the exemplar created through the Coptic-Jewish collaboration described at the beginning of this essay (and further below). Manuscripts of this type include a preface, which contains a long exploration of the features of Saʿadia's translation in comparison to those of other Christian, Jewish, and Samaritan translators of the Bible. Further, the preface's anonymous author introduces a system of rubricated marks. Variant readings, text-critical observations, etymological notes, and explanations of the Hebrew original are noted between the lines and in the margins. The whole enterprise was prompted by a wish to return to the original character of the Tafsīr.

(3) The group of revised manuscripts of the Tafsīr supplement the basic text with a set of additional texts. These manuscripts fall into two subgroups. In the first, the translation is preceded by an edificatory proem that elaborates on the abrogation of Mosaic law (Arab. *al-sharīʿa al-musawiyya*)—that is, the Torah—by the New Testament. Each book of the Pentateuch is preceded by a short summary of its contents, referred to as a "study guide" (Arab. *dallāl*). The manuscripts close with an account, called the "epilogue" (Arab. *al-khātima*), of how the Hebrew Scriptures were handed down through an authoritative, unbroken line of transmit-

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14. E.g., Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS Or. 112, fol. 1r.

15. On the Coptic division, see Joseph Francis Rhode, *The Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch in the Church of Egypt: A Study from Eighteen Arabic and Copto-Arabic MSS (Ninth–Seventeenth Century) in the National Library at Paris, the Vatican and Bodleian Libraries and the British Museum* (Leipzig: W. Drugulin, 1921), 111–13.

16. Other manuscripts of this basic type include MSS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Copt. 1; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud. Or. 272; London, British Library, Or. 422; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hunt. 33; Vatican, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Copt. 2–4; and Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Bibl. 2–5. For details on these, see Vollandt, *Arabic Versions*, 229–34.

ters, until they were eventually translated into a variety of languages and thus became corrupted. The epilogue elaborates further, and, fashioned after the rabbinic tractate of the Chapters of the Fathers (Hebr. Pirqe Avot), provides the chain of transmission, until the Scriptures were translated into Arabic. It recounts how, after being revealed (Arab. *anzala*) to Moses, the text of the Torah was passed on (Arab. *sallama*) through a long line of judges and prophets, from Joshua bin Nun through Ezekiel and finally to Malachi, the last of the biblical prophets. From there the Torah was passed on from Ezra to some of the tannaitic pairs, including Yehoshua b. Perakhiah and Nittai of Arbela, Yose b. Yoḥannan and Shimon b. Shetaḥ, and, finally, Avtalion and Shemaya. When Titus conquered Jerusalem (70 CE), the Torah was saved and transferred to Betar; and when Davidic descendants, identified as a family of exiles (Arab. *al-ashrāf min nasl Da'ūd*), escaped the destruction of Betar by Hadrian (135 CE), they took the Torah with them to Baghdad, where they reside to this very day in exile, as the text says. As the knowledge of the Hebrew language diminished, different Jewish factions rendered the Torah into Arabic and, by means of the translations, its text was disseminated among the nations. On the other hand, in those manuscripts belonging to the second subgroup of the revised type, Sa'adia's Tafsīr is interspersed with the commentary of Mark b. al-Qunbar.

It is, thus, not farfetched to conclude that the Tafsīr in Arabic script was in heavy use, indeed until quite recent times. That Sa'adia's version of the Torah was granted a canonical status of some sort becomes obvious not only from the sheer number of preserved manuscripts, but even more so in light of the textual creativity with which it was revised, augmented, and appended with thematically related introductory prefaces, short treatises, and commentaries by Coptic scholars. These manuscripts, of which only a very small number have undergone a thorough investigation, evidence that the Tafsīr was a popular object of study and that its transmission was carefully safeguarded. The function that the Tafsīr fulfilled in the Coptic church—and the reason it had to be studied and transmitted meticulously—finds its expression in the accompanying texts of the revised and extended manuscript types.

Al-As'ad ibn al-'Assāl's Preface to the Tafsīr: A Translation

From my readings and from the historical accounts it emerges that the seventy-two translators [of the LXX] rendered the Torah from Hebrew

into Greek without any fault. Only thereafter, when it was translated from Greek into Arabic, did the insufficient knowledge of both languages became apparent. I, however, have never met a Greek [Melkite] who was of such education in literature that he could act as a reviewer with me by comparing the Greek source text with the Arabic translation.

Also the Jews who translated the Torah into Arabic fell short in these two aforementioned matters. However, as I perused the translation of the learned Rabbanite Saʿīd al-Fayyūmī [hereafter Saʿadia], I satisfied myself—owing to his style—that he is the most preferred of all translators and the most eloquent interpreter among the people of his confession. I found his concise Arabic diction, his overall eloquence, the consistent homophonic correspondence (*ittiḥād masmūʿ*) between the Arabic and the Hebrew, the rendering of proper names and countries, and the Hebrew terminology that was retained in the Arabic translation, as well as the absence of textual distortions (*taṣḥīf*) and his elegant transfer of obscure into clear words—to be very pleasing to the ear. Thus I copied his version in what follows this preface, and with the intention of editing (*taḥrīr*) it most accurately. For this purpose, I summoned to my aid one of the most notable Israel-ites, whose name is stated at the end of this copy. He had memorized the text and recalled its words skillfully. Further, he was well versed in the study of its expressions, its recitation (*tilāwa*), and everything related to the interpretation of its meaning and also grasped its underlying intention. In his hand, he held a copy in Hebrew letters, from which he read aloud in Arabic. In my hand, I held the present copy in Arabic letters, which is Saʿadia's translation that I intend to transcribe.

Furthermore, I had in front of me a number of additional Arabic ver-sions of the Torah. Some of these were translated by notable Samaritan scholars from Hebrew into Arabic. Others are from the Greek, including the translations of al-Ḥārith ibn Sinān and ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl, and also an ancient one in which the name of the translators is not mentioned. Another is the copy of the priest al-Faḍl Abū al-Faraj b. al-Ṭayyib, includ-ing a translation and commentary from Syriac into Arabic. What is more, I had at my disposal a number of commentaries of Christian, Jewish, and Samaritan provenance. As for the Christian commentaries, there are those by John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea; both spoke with the help of the Holy Spirit. With regard to the Jewish commentaries, there are those by the learned scholar Abū al-Faraj b. Asad, the teacher Abū ʿAlī al-Baṣrī, and the prince Abū Saʿīd al-Dāwūdī. For the Samaritan commentaries, I had the commentary of the scholar Sadaqa al-Mutaṭabbib.

The comparison revealed to me that Sa'adia used a number of techniques in his translation. The first is the use of additional words in many instances to clarify the meaning, which I pointed out in this translation. In this copy, I have placed the letter *zāy* [= *ziyāda*, "addition"] as a rubricated sign over all additions in order to signal each such instance. Whenever you encounter this letter in red ink, know that something has been added by Sa'adia with the purpose of specifying, elucidating, and completing the sense in the Arabic language or to avoid anthropomorphism. This is illustrated in the narrative of Sodom and Gomorra (Gen 18:33): "And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left off speaking to Abraham" [NRSV], which he translated: "And the messenger of the Lord [went his way, as soon as he had left off speaking to Abraham]," either to remove suspicion of anthropomorphism and undermine the arguments of the stubborn and skeptics; or for other reasons that will reveal themselves to one who observes closely, if he is knowledgeable.

Al-As'ad ibn al-'Assāl's Preface to the Tafsīr: A Short Commentary

In his preface, al-As'ad ibn al-'Assāl describes the great variety of Arabic translations that were in use among the Copts in his day. It did not escape his attention that each of them, being based on multiple source languages, had its own internal history, which had led to variations in the text. The motif of corruption in translation is prominent in many contemporaneous writings—mainly but not exclusively of Muslim provenance—where it was usually linked to the concept of *taḥrīf*, that is, the twisting and distortion of the divine revelation.[17] Transmission was flawed, he recounts, due either to an insufficient knowledge of the source and/or target language or to the translator's particular agenda.

He summarizes the account of Ptolemy, king of Egypt, who commissioned seventy-two Jewish scholars to translate the Torah into Greek,[18] which he could have known from the Arabic translation of Sefer Josippon. He mentions that he has failed to find a Melkite to help him study the Arabic translation in juxtaposition with the Septuagint. However, he praises Sa'adia's translation and finds it most excellent in terms of style,

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17. Vollandt, *Arabic Versions*, 12 n. 30.

18. Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 192–216.

eloquence, and accuracy. He arrived at this conclusion by comparing it with other translations and commentaries: Jewish, Samaritan, and Christian. The authors that are mentioned here in his preface fall in two categories: those who produced a translation (Arab. *naql* or *tafsīr*) of the Torah and those who produced a commentary (*sharḥ*) on it. Among the first group we find Saʿadia for the Jews; an unspecified Samaritan scholar (probably Abū Saʿīd [Egypt, thirteenth century]); and for the Christians al-Ḥārith ibn Sinān (Ḥarran, active before 956), ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Faḍl (Antioch, eleventh century), and finally Abū Faraj ibn al-Ṭayyib (Iraq, eleventh century). The first commentators he mentions are the church fathers Basil the Great (d. 379) and John Chrysostom (d. 407). In addition, he was familiar with Karaite scholars such as Yeshuʿah ben Yehudah (referred to by his Arabic name Abū al-Faraj b. Asad; Jerusalem, mid-eleventh century), Yefet ben ʿElī (Arabic: Abū ʿAlī al-Baṣrī; Jerusalem, tenth century), and David ben Boaz (Arabic: Abū Saʿīd al-Dāwūdī; Jerusalem, late tenth century).

Al-Asʿad's main interest was in the Hebrew original, which, were it not for Saʿadia's Tafsīr, would have remained a closed book to him. As is known, the Tafsīr is not a literal translation. In order to grasp the original meaning of the Hebrew, al-Asʿad had to first establish an accurate text of the Tafsīr and discern which parts of Saʿadia's translation reflect his translation technique and which the Hebrew source. For this purpose, he reports, he solicited the help of Abū al-Majd.

The second part of the preface describes four ways (*masālik*)—today we would call them *techniques*—that are prominent in Saʿadia's approach to translation. It is well known that the exegesis embedded in Saʿadia's Tafsīr is one of its major features. The Tafsīr attempts to reconcile the biblical text with halakhic practice and hermeneutic implications, on the one hand, and, on the other, by taking into consideration linguistic and stylistic requirements of the Arabic language by omitting repetitive elements, condensing the narrative, and providing referential links through the insertion of temporal conjunctions. Accordingly, the Tafsīr contains great liberties with the formal structure of the Hebrew source and is anything but a literal rendering of the text. An explanation must have been provided by Abū al-Majd.

The first technique consists of interpretive additions. As shown by the case of Gen 18:33, where Saʿadia's "and the messenger of the LORD" introduces a mediating agent, these insertions are often meant to eliminate anthropomorphisms. Other additions clarify or gloss part of the biblical

verse in which they occur. Because they are extraneous to the Hebrew text, al-As'ad as editor marked them with the siglum /*zāy*/. For example, he marks the text of Gen 2:17, which reads "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (NRSV) in the Hebrew. Sa'adia translates *tasṭaḥaqqu an tamūt*, adding "you shall be due [to die]" to reconcile with the fact that Adam does not die immediately as a consequence of the transgression. The end of Gen 4:7 deals with the duty to resist the impulse to sin ("but you must master it," NRSV); Sa'adia, using the terminology of contemporaneous rational theology (*kalām*) and in order to counter the notion of determinism, added *bi-l-ikhtiyār*, "out of free will," so that the end of the verse reads: "and you shall rule over it [sin] out of free will."

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The Yemenite Branch of Manuscripts
of Saʿadia Gaon's Tafsīr

Doron Yaʿakov

Introduction

Saʿadia Gaon's translation of the Torah was widespread among Eastern Jewish communities for the first few centuries after it was written, but beginning in the thirteenth century it was gradually replaced by other translations.[1] Each community formulated a translation in a language that was similar to the vernacular of the community members. Only the Yemenite Jews continued using Saʿadia Gaon's translation until the last generation of Jews that lived there (mid-twentieth century). They studied the translation in their schools, generally as part of the weekly study of the Torah portion.[2]

Therefore, it is not surprising that nearly all the extant manuscripts of Saʿadia Gaon's translation are Yemenite. They number approximately ten thousand. Most of them are later manuscripts—from the seventeenth

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Editor's Note: This essay examines the *language* of a specific Torah translation in a certain context in order to place it against a wider context. Therefore, it contains more examples in the original language (Judeo-Arabic in Hebrew script) than other essays in this collection.

1. Yosef Tobi, "Between Tafsir and Sharh: Saadia Gaon's Translation of the Bible among the Jews of Yemen" [Hebrew], *Studies in the History and Culture of Iraqi Jewry* 6 (1991): 128–31; Mordechai Cohen, "Bible Exegesis: Rabbanite," *EJIW* 1:442–57; Meira Polliack, "Bible Translations: Judeo-Arabic (Ninth to Thirteenth Century)," *EJIW* 1:464–69.

2. Tobi, "Between Tafsir and Sharh," 131–38; Eliezer Schlossberg, "Saʿadya Gaon's Commentaries in the *Ḥeleq Ha-Diqduq* of R. Yiḥya Ṣāleḥ" [Hebrew], *Tema* 5 (1995): 85–86.

century onward.[3] It stands to reason that earlier manuscripts were prevalent before the catastrophe that befell the Yemenite Jews in 1679, when, together with many other books owned by Jews, they were lost forever.[4] In more recent times, at least five editions of Saʿadia Gaon's translation were printed for Yemenite Jews. The first of those editions is very famous—printed in Jerusalem between the years 1894 and 1899 by Avraham an-Naddāf (1866–1940) and distributed in Yemen as well.[5] During the last generation of Jews in Yemen most of the study of the Tafsīr was from that printed edition.

In the research of the text of Saʿadia Gaon's translation, all the Yemenite manuscripts are referred to as stemming from one textual branch. According to researchers, the manuscripts vary only slightly, and therefore they can be grouped as one.[6] The Yemenite branch stands beside the Eastern branch, both of which transmit the translation in Hebrew script. Opposite them stand the Christian branch that transmits the translation predominantly in Arabic script and the Samaritan branch that incorporated additional components into the original Tafsīr.[7]

Researchers evaluated the Yemenite branch and expressed their views on its adherence to the original translation. Kahle thought that the fact the translation was transmitted in Hebrew script deemed it to be less than

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3. Eliezer Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition of Rav Saadia Gaon's Translation of the Torah" [Hebrew], *Talelei Orot* 13 (2007): 91.

4. Yosef Tobi, *The Jews of Yemen: Studies in Their History and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 78–84.

5. Shalom ʿIrāqi Kats and Avraham an-Naddāf, *Keter Tora, Named Tāj by Our Ancestors* [Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic] (Jerusalem: Zuckerman, 1899).

6. See, for example, Berend J. Dikken, "Some Remarks about Middle Arabic and Saʿadya Gaon's Arabic Translation of the Pentateuch in Manuscripts of Jewish, Samaritan, Coptic Christian, and Muslim Provenance," in *Middle Arabic and Mixed Arabic: Diachrony and Synchrony*, ed. L. Zack and A. Schippers (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 56–57.

7. Ronny Vollandt, "Christian-Arabic Translations of the Pentateuch from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries: A Comparative Study of Manuscripts and Translation Techniques" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2011), 182–204; Vollandt. *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 221–44; Haseeb Shehadeh, *The Arabic Translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1989–2002); Tamar Zewi, *The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch: Critical Edition and Study of MS London BL OR7562 and Related MSS*, Biblia Arabica 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

authentic.[8] In his opinion the original translation was written in Arabic script. However, many other researchers challenged his premise.[9] Moshe Zucker, Yehuda Ratzabi, and Joshua Blau claimed that the Yemenite branch is extremely close to Saʿadia Gaon's original text.[10] Blau wrote that the most accurate manuscript of Saʿadia Gaon's translation is an Eastern manuscript (MS SP RNL Yebr.-Arab. 2 C) written shortly after Saʿadia Gaon's death.[11] The Arabic in that translation reflects a postclassical variety, close to literary Arabic. The Yemenite manuscripts reflect a text that is similar to that of the Eastern manuscript, which indicates their faithfulness to the original translation.[12]

However, there are many differences between the Eastern manuscript and the Yemenite ones, mainly relating to various linguistic features that typify the Arabic of the translation.[13] It stands to reason that over time there were changes that entered the text of the translation in Yemen. To a degree, those changes obscured the classical style and characteristics of its language. In many instances, the Yemenite texts were amended to reflect the spoken Yemenite Arabic dialect. In other cases, the text of the translation was adjusted to better agree with the Hebrew source.

Eliezer Schlossberg, in his introduction toward a critical edition of Saʿadia Gaon's translation, adopted Blau's view and considered the Eastern manuscript a primary source in the research of the text of the translation.[14] Schlossberg is aware of the fact that there are differences between the Yemenite manuscripts, and it appears that in his opinion the variations are primarily due to chronology, namely, that the earlier manuscripts are

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8. Paul E. Kahle, *Die arabischen Bibelübersetzungen: Texte mit Glossar und Literaturübersicht* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), X.

9. Recently by Dikken, "Some Remarks."

10. Moshe Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah: Exegesis, Halakha, and Polemics in R. Saadya's Translation of the Pentateuch* [Hebrew] (New York: Feldheim, 1959), 317; Yehudah Ratzaby, *A Dictionary of Judaeo-Arabic in R. Saadya's Tafsīr* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1985), 23; Joshua Blau, ed. *Judeo-Arabic Literature: Selected Texts* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980), 19; Blau, "The Linguistic Character of Saadia Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 2 n. 4.

11. Joshua Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation in Light of an Early Eleventh-Century Egyptian Manuscript" [Hebrew], *Lĕšonénu* 61 (1998): 111–30.

12. Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation," 112–14.

13. Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation," 117–27.

14. Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition," 95.

the better ones.[15] Even though, as stated earlier, research to date deems the Yemenite branch to be a single unit,[16] in my opinion more emphasis needs to be placed on the differences between the manuscripts. By doing so one might describe more accurately the Yemenite transmission of Saʻadia Gaon's translation and how that transmission developed throughout the history of its manuscripts.

In the following I set out to prove the claim that the earlier manuscripts are the better ones. To do so, I have examined a number of Yemenite manuscripts from different periods and compared the translations of a few select segments in the Torah (primarily from Genesis). I then compared my findings to the text of the Eastern manuscript. The results indeed show that the text of the earlier manuscripts is more faithful to the Eastern manuscript. The significance of that is that, on the one hand, the earlier manuscripts contain more elements from Classical Arabic and, on the other, they allow for a freer translation of the biblical Hebrew text.

Berend Dikken considered two manuscripts to be the earliest testimony of the Yemenite transmission of the Tafsīr.[17] Schlossberg referred to a different manuscript, and research has shown the latter to predate the other two.[18] For the purposes of this article I established three groups of manuscripts. The first group, manuscripts dated prior to the sixteenth century, will be group A. This group includes a manuscript from the British Library (A1) and the Oxford manuscript (A2).[19] In this group I also included photocopies of pages of a very early manuscript (held in private hands) that I obtained, that include some fragments from Saʻadia Gaon's translation. Based on the form and style of the script, the upper Babylonian diacritics and other considerations, it dates from approximately the thirteenth century (A3).[20] I examined two manuscripts from the seventeenth

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15. Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition," 98.

16. Many even considered An-Naddāf's printed edition an exemplification of the Yemenite transmission: Blau, *Judeo-Arabic Literature*; Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation"; Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition," 92–93; Zewi, *The Samaritan Version*, 47–62 and 77–83.

17. Dikken, "Some Remarks," 56–57. In my opinion, the second manuscript that was referred to does not indicate the precedence that the first one does.

18. Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition," 98.

19. A1: BL Or1041, from the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It includes only the text of the Tafsīr. A2: Bod. MS Opp. Add. Q4. 98, from the fourteenth century. It, too, includes only the text of the Tafsīr.

20. The segments I received include each verse of the MT with full Babylonian

century for the second group (B): a manuscript from the Jewish Theologi-cal Seminary (B1) and a manuscript from the British Library (B2).[21] The third group contains a late manuscript from the nineteenth century from the Jewish Theological Seminary (C1) and Avraham An-Naddāf's printed edition (C2).[22]

I will present examples of variations between the groups. Most of the examples are based on Blau's observations.[23] All of the English transla-tions of the biblical (MT) examples are from the NRSV. I compared all the Yemenite manuscripts to the Eastern manuscript (S), and its version matches the first manuscript quoted in each case, unless otherwise noted. There are three types of cases discussed: cases that relate to classical attri-butes in the Arabic of the translation; cases that relate to the parity, or disparity, between the translation and the Hebrew text; and other types of variations. The original Judeo-Arabic text (in Hebrew script) is printed in bold; Hebrew Bible quotations are in regular Hebrew font.

Classical Elements versus Yemenite Spoken Dialects

In the earlier manuscripts, classical elements of Middle Arabic are retained even where the spoken Yemenite Arabic dialects (and other Neo-Arabic dialects) do otherwise.

(1) The sound masculine plural is usually ‏ין–‎, in any syntactic posi-tion, in all Yemenite manuscripts, throughout all periods. So also in A, for example: ‏**ואלכנעניין ואלפרזיין**‎ (A3, ‏והכנעני והפרזי אז ישב בארץ‎, "the Canaan-ites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time," Gen 13:7) as the subject of the sentence. Gentilic nouns always receive this suffix, excluding

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diacritics, followed by Onkelos's translation with full Babylonian diacritics, followed by the Tafsīr with very partial Babylonian diacritics (mainly *shadda* and *ḍamma*). These segments include Gen 6:5–19; 12:7–18; 18:5–19; Num 9:23–10:9; 11:10–16; Deut 25:6–26:1.

21. B1: New York, USA, MS 9842, dated 1650. Manuscript B1 has a layout similar to A3, but the MT is marked with Tiberian diacritics and cantillations. B2: BL Or2228, dated 1655. This manuscript also includes the MT marked with Tiberian diacritics and cantillations, Onkelos's translation with Babylonian diacritics, and the text of the Tafsīr. The biblical verses are at the top right corner of each page, and the translations surround them.

22. C1: New York, USA, MS 9065.1, dated 1807. It is named "Forosho" because it includes Rashi's commentary as well. C2: Kats, *Keter Tora*.

23. Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation."

the name מצריון ("Egyptians") that consistently receives the suffix ון–.[24] But in A1 the verse continues: [חי]נד'] מקימון פי אלבלד; the predicate מקימון received the suffix ון– in accordance with classical grammar and with the text of S. This is a good indication that there was a strong tendency to end gentilic names with the suffix ין– even in earlier periods. The suffix ון– does appear at times in group C as well, particularly in nominal sentences after הם ("they").[25]

(2) In group A, the verb form before a plural subject corresponds to Classical Arabic: for example, והיה כי יראו אתך המצרים (A1, ראך אלמצריון), "and when the Egyptians see you," Gen 12:12); רא[ו]ך אלמצריון (A2); ראי' ויראו המצרים (A, אלמצריון, "the Egyptians saw," Gen 12:14). In group B the first verb was amended: ראוך ... ראי. In group C the transition to the spoken dialect was completed: ראוך ... ראו.

(3) The accusative marker appears properly: אזואגא אזואגא ... ד'כורא שנים שנים ... זכר ונקבה (A1, A2, ואנאת'א), "two and two … male and female," Gen 7:9); אזואגא אזואגא ... ד'כור ואנאת' (A3, B). In group C it was omitted in this verse, as in the vernacular: אזואג אזואג ... ד'כור ואנאת'.[26]

(4) At times the early Yemenite manuscripts reflect classical structures more than S,[27] such as the dual form here: ולם יטיקא אן יקימא (A, B, ולא יכלו לשבת, "they could not live," Gen 13:6, with regard to Abraham and Lot). In group C and S: יטיקו ... יקימו.

(5) Case markers in the possessive forms: in the earlier manuscripts the syntactic position affects the case. קאול קין הבל אב'אה (A, ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו, "Cain said to his brother Abel," Gen 4:8); קאול קין הבל אב'יה (B1); קאל קין הבל אב'יה (B2). But in C: קאל קין להבל אב'יה. In the later manuscripts the frozen form אב'יה appears in all syntactic positions, just as it is frozen in the spoken dialect (with the exception that the final vowel is ū, ʾaxūh).

(6) Classical conditioning of the verb suffix ן– in the future tense (dual and plural): ויציראן (A1, והיו, "and they become," Gen 2:24), ו/פיכונאן (A2, B1), but in later manuscripts ו/פיכונא (B2, C); also יכונן (A1, Gen 6:11), in all other manuscripts יכונו.

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24. Probably because that form is used in the spoken dialect.

25. As in הם בשרים, "they are mortal" (Gen 6:3); or והם ואגעון (וגעון), "while all of them were still in pain" (Gen 34:25).

26. See Wolfdietrich Fischer and Otto Jastrow, eds., *Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980), 87.

27. Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation," 127–28.

(7) Agreement between the relative pronoun and the antecedent: **אלשגרה אלתי** (A, B, העץ אשר, "the tree which," Gen 3:17). In C: **אלד'י**, as the pronoun is used in the spoken language.

(8) Retaining the rules of אַן (اِنَّ) and her sisters: adding a pronominal suffix after אַן when not immediately followed by a noun: **פאנה אלי' סבעה איאם** (A, כי לימים עוד שבעה, "for in seven days," Gen 7:4); but in B and C: **פאן אלי'**.[28]

(9) An indefinite noun is not followed by a relative pronoun: **כל בשרי פיה** (A, B, C1, כל בשר אשר בו, "all flesh in which," Gen 6:17). In C2: **כל בשרי אלד'י פיה**.

(10) The classical form of the verb **ראא** (رَأَى) in the future tense: **ליריה** (B, לראות, "to see," Gen 2:19), **ליוריה** (A, C).[29]

<div align="center">Correspondence with the Hebrew Text</div>

(1) ואדם אַיִן לעבד את האדמה. ואד יעלה מן הארץ והשקה את כל פני האדמה, "there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground" (Gen 2:5–6): **ולא בכ'אר כאן יצעד מנהא** "and no steam came up from it" (A, B); C: **ובכ'אר כאן יצעד מנהא**. Saʿadia Gaon understood the negative אַיִן to refer to both verses, but later manuscripts amended the Tafsīr to reflect the meaning of the second verse as explained by other exegetes.[30]

(2) ותצחק שרה בקרבה לאמר ... למה זה צחקה שרה לאמר, "So Sarah laughed to herself, saying ... Why did Sarah laugh, and say" (Gen 18:12–13): **פצ'חכת סרה פי נפסהא קאילה ... קאילה** (A, B1, S with slight variation), namely, the participle **קאילה** is a circumstantial accusative (حال). In B2 and C: **קאילא**,[31] as לאמר is translated elsewhere.

(3) ויתן להם יוסף עגלות על פי פרעה ויתן להם צדה לדרך, "Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey" (Gen 45:21): **ואעטאהם יוסף עגלא באמר פרעון**

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28. See William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896–1898), 2:81.

29. Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation," 126. Here group B is seen to reflect an earlier version than group A.

30. See Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition," 92–93.

31. There is a difference between the forms in the Yemenite rendering of the Tafsīr: *gāyilah* as opposed to *gāyilā*.

ואעטאהם ... ואעטא (A, B; C1: **זואדא ... עגאלא**). But in C2: **וזאדא לאלטריק**
זאדא. The repetition of the verb agrees with the Hebrew verse.

(4) **למען הציל אתו מידם להשיבו אל אביו**, "that he might rescue him out
of their hand and restore him to his father" (Gen 37:22): **לקבל אן יכ'לצה**
מן אידיהם וירדה אלי אביה (A). B and C: **לירדה אלי אביה**. The form **לירדה** is
more similar to the Hebrew **להשיבו**.

(5) **חטאו משקה מלך מצרים והאפה לאדניהם למלך מצרים**, "the cupbearer
of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt"
(Gen 40:1): **אד'נבא לסיידהמא מלך מצר ... ** (A); **אד'נבא לסיידהמא** (B, C).
Saʻadia Gaon, in accordance with his usual practice, does not repeat words
he considers duplicates.[32]

(6) **חֹמתיך הגבהֹת והבצֻרות**, "your high and fortified walls" (Deut
28:52): **אלשאמכ'ה אלחצינה** (A, B). There are two asyndetic adjectives, as
is customary in Classical, and Saʻadia Gaon's, Arabic.[33] However, in C:
אלשאמכ'ה ואלחצינה as it appears in the Hebrew verse.

Other Types of Variations

(1) **הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו לדעת טוב ורע**, "See, the man has become like
one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:22): **הוד'א אדם קד צאר כואחד**
מנא פי[ה] מערפה (A1, B). In A2 and in C: **מנה מערפה אלכ'יר ואלשר**. The
variations stem from exegesis: the word **ממנו**, and therefore the entire
sentence, is ambiguous. One option is: "man has become like **one of us**,
knowing good and evil."[34] The other option is: "man has become as one,
and from him to know good and evil."[35]

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32. Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation*, 267–69.

33. See Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation*, 265.

34. The cantillation signs support this exegesis; a *zaqef* is marked over the word
ממנו. Other commentaries support it as well.

35. Onkelos supports this option: **הא אדם הוה יחידאי בעלמא, מניה למדע טב וביש**,
as also Maimonides in his Commentary on the Mishnah, in the eighth chapter of the
introduction to Tractate Avot (J. Qafiḥ, ed, *Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah:
The Arabic Text with a Hebrew Translation*, vol. 4 [Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook,
1965], 400). See also Yosef Ofer, "ʻBehold, the Man Is Become as One of Us, to Know
Good and Evil' (Gen. 3:22): Interpretation and Reading Traditions in Tiberias and
Babylonia" [Hebrew], in *Al Derekh Ha'Avot: Articles about Bible and Education*, ed. A.
Bazaq (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2001), 419–31.

(2) The spelling of proper nouns: the name שרה in A is always סרה.
In B and C, שרה. In S the spelling is [36]ס[א]רה or סארה. But שָׂרַי remains
the spelling in the Tafsīr as it appears in the Hebrew. אברהם is spelled
אברהים in A, like the Muslim Arabic spelling of the name. But in B and C
it is spelled אבראהם, reflecting the spelling of the Yemenite Jewish Arabic
name.

(3) Rare nouns: ומחיתי את כל היקום אשר עשיתי, "and every living
thing that I have made I will blot out" (Gen 7:4): ואמחו גמיע אלאנאם אלתי
צנעתהם (A1). In B: גמיע אלאנאם אלד'י צנעתהם. In A2 and C: גמיע אלנאס
אלד'י צנעתהם.[37] In S: גמיע אלאנאם אלדין צנעתהם. The rare word אלאנאם
("humankind") was replaced by a more common word that is graphically
similar, אלנאס ("the people").[38]

(4) Rare forms: והיו בך לאות ולמופת ובזרעך עד עולם, "They shall be
among you and your descendants as a sign and a portent forever" (Deut
28:46): אלמשאבהין אלי אלדהר ופי נסלך (A, B). In C: אלמשאבהיך לך ("that
are similar to you"). The later manuscripts amended the rare combination
of a definite noun with an enclitic possessive.[39]

(5) Matters of text: ואברהם הלך עמם לשלחם, "and Abraham went with
them to set them on their way" (Gen 18:16): מאצ'י (A, B; in S: מאצ'[40]). In
C: סאיר.

ויעברו אנשים מדינים סחרים, "When some Midianite traders passed
by" (Gen 37:28): פלמא מר בהם אלרגאל אלמדיאניין אלתגאר (A, B, C1; in S:
אלמדיאניון). But in C2: פלמא מר בהם אלתגאר.[41]

(6) The vowel of the future tense prefix of form IV. The Yemenite man-
uscripts often mark the *ḍammah* (signifying a short *u* vowel) in the Tafsīr
with a Babylonian *qibbuṣ* mark. In group A it is marked at times, in group
B more so, and in C it is marked almost consistently. The form IV future
tense prefix is not marked with a *qibbuṣ*, which indicates that the vowel

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36. א marking a long vowel is sometimes elided in S in the spelling of common
words (Blau, "The Linguistic Character," 123–24). It is possible that the set spelling
סרה in the Yemenite manuscripts (in which the א is usually not elided) is in juxtaposi-
tion with the Hebrew spelling.

37. This part of the A2 manuscript is a later supplement.

38. See Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation," 122, regarding the modified
noun in this verse.

39. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 2:67.

40. Blau, "The Linguistic Character," 6.

41. Probably omitted accidentally.

shifted to correspond with the local Arabic dialects.[42] The current tradition of reading the Tafsīr has the prefix usually read with a vowel, probably influenced by form I. This pronunciation seems to be reflected in the later manuscripts that do not mark the diacritic, as stated earlier. Yet in A3, four verbs in form IV are marked with a *qibbuṣ*:[43] תַּכְמלהא, "finish it" (Gen 6:16); לאֶהלך, "to destroy" (Gen 6:17); וְאֶתּ'בת, "I will establish" (Gen 6:18); אֶעטיהא, "I will give it" (Gen 13:17). This clearly indicates that the earlier reading of the Tafsīr maintained the classical vowel of the prefix.

Other Elements in the Yemenite Manuscripts

Despite all the examples above, even the earliest Yemenite manuscripts reflect a later Arabic in many regards, and frequently they do not agree to the testimony of manuscript S. Even the classical elements demonstrated above are not preserved consistently. For example, 'ט is always replaced by 'צ. I found no occurrence of 'ט in all of the Yemenite manuscripts. So too the numerals: they always appear in the frozen form, such as with the suffix ין–.[44]

Summary

I have demonstrated some instances (and those are just examples) where the earlier the Yemenite manuscript is, it shows more compliance with Classical Arabic, while maintaining a freer translation that is not restricted by the literal text of the Bible. Based on manuscript S (and other testimonies), they are closer to the original language, style, and text of the Tafsīr. One has to bear in mind that the earliest extant manuscripts date from the thirteenth century; the translation had been written over two hundred years previously. As shown by the chronological gradation of the varia-

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42. The use of form IV decreased significantly in the Neo-Arabic dialects (Fischer and Jastrow, *Handbuch der arabischen Dialekte*, 70).

43. For technical reasons, the Babylonian *qibbuṣ* sign was replaced with the regular *qibbuṣ* sign.

44. In group A numerals are often written in abbreviated form, for example in A3: ש' ד'ראע טולהא ונ' ערצ'הא ול' סמכהא, "the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits" (Gen 6:15). Is it due to economy alone, or is it an attempt to displace classical forms?

tions between the manuscripts, it can be assumed that if we had had earlier manuscripts they would have been closer to the original Tafsīr.[45]

This claim strengthens the status attributed to the Yemenite manuscripts of Saʿadia Gaon's Tafsīr. They essentially agree with the text of the early Eastern branch and reflect an Arabic language similar to Classical Arabic. Both branches independently testify to Saʿadia Gaon's original language.

Another practical matter of significance is that any research of Saʿadia Gaon's Tafsīr that includes the Yemenite manuscripts should distinguish between the developmental stages of the Yemenite text. Work on a critical edition of Saʿadia Gaon's text should promote the earliest manuscripts. And it goes without saying that the printed edition C2 is not an adequate testimony of the Yemenite branch since it contains many flaws.

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45. The connection between Yemenite Jewry and Babylonia and Saʿadia Gaon is known from early periods. As an example, see Abraham Halkin and David Hartman, eds., *Epistles of Maimonides: Crisis and Leadership* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1993), 114.

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The Bible as History:
Sa'adia Gaon, Yefet ben 'Eli, Samuel ben Ḥofni, and Maimonides on the Genealogy of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom (Genesis 36)

Yosef Yuval Tobi

Introduction

The sages of Israel in the Judeo-Arabic cultural context of the Middle Ages treated the Bible as a human literary work, without doubting in the slightest its essence as a divinely-inspired prophetic book. Thus, for example, Sa'adia Gaon does not hesitate to incorporate into his commentary on the book of Psalms linguistic, poetic, and structural comments that are accepted in literary analyses of human works of creativity, while at the same time viewing it as a prophetic book spoken to David by the mouth of God. One of the questions often pondered by the sages of Israel has to do with the status of the narrative-historical sections of the Bible, which in themselves contain neither practical nor supplementary instructions for performing one's religious duties. Just as Moshe Zucker has already noted, this question was also discussed by the Muslim scholars regarding the Qur'an.[1] As a matter of fact, the very question had already been raised by the talmudic sages, though not in the detailed formulation of an abstract idea, but rather in a specific reference to a particular matter.[2] In any case, like the approach taken by the Jewish sages in relation to the Bible, the accepted approach among the Muslim scholars was that the narrative parts of the Qur'an have also a moral function, that is, to learn thereby what is

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1. See Moshe Zucker's preface in *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1984), 62–63.
2. See further below.

considered a virtuous act for which a person will receive reward, and what is considered a nefarious act for which a person is liable to punishment.

Nevertheless, the sages' bewilderment over the Bible's integration of its historical parts was repeatedly raised as a fundamental question by medieval Jewish philosophers and commentators of the Bible, who, in their Judeo-Arabic cultural setting, rendered in layman's terms its plain meaning. In what follows, we shall discuss the attitude of four sages, all of whom rejected in one way or another the rabbinic midrashic literature, or else dismissed its literal interpretation:

1. Sa'adia Gaon (Egypt-Iraq, 882–942), whose attitude toward rabbinic midrashic literature was ambivalent: he adopted it in his liturgies but did not recoil from denouncing it in his commentary on the Bible,[3] much like other Geonim, such as Sherira Gaon and Hayé (Hai or Hay) Gaon, who were not afraid to answer those who turned to such literature that "we do not rely upon the words of Aggadah";[4]

2. The Karaite Yefet ben 'Eli the Levite (lived in the second half of the tenth century CE in Jerusalem), whose very association with the Karaite sect made him reject the words of the sages;

3. Samuel ben Ḥofni (officiated as the Gaon of the Sura Academy during the years 998–1013), who, in principle, adopted Sa'adia Gaon's approach; and

4. Maimonides (1138–1204), who argued that the rabbinic midrashic literature must be understood in the context of allegory, and even declared in several places in his works that his intention was to compile a book entitled *The Book of Homilies* for the said purpose of explication.

The position taken by Jewish philosophers was expressed in their philosophical works, for example, Sa'adia in his book *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, and Maimonides in his book *The Guide for the Perplexed*. How-

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3. See Yosef Tobi, "Sa'adia's Biblical Exegesis and his Poetic Practice," *Hebrew Annual Review* 8 (1984): 241–57; Haggai Ben-Shammai, *A Leader's Project: Studies in the Philosophical and Exegetical Works on Saadia Gaon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2015), 336–73.

4. See Yehoshua' Horowits, "The Attitude of the Ge'onim to the Aggadah" [Hebrew], *Mahanayim* 7 (1994): 122–29.

ever, exegetes of the Bible—and in this category we must once again number among their ranks Saʿadia, along with Yefet ben ʿEli, and Samuel ben Ḥofni— expressed their positions in their biblical commentaries. The philosophical writings of Saʿadia and Maimonides, as well as significant portions of Saʿadia's commentary on the Bible, have come down to us in manuscripts preserved by Jewish communities in the East and which have all seen print from the beginning in the nineteenth century. Saʿadia's commentary on the second part of Genesis, including this portion of *Vayishlaḥ*, have not reached us. Some say that he did not write a commentary on this particular portion at all. Nevertheless, Saʿadia refers to the issue discussed in his introduction to two books of the Bible, namely, Genesis and Psalms. In contrast, the commentaries of Yefet on the Bible, as well as that of Samuel ben Ḥofni on the Pentateuch, were only preserved in the Cairo Genizah. Fragments of Samuel ben Ḥofni's commentary were published from the Genizah manuscripts, while the extensive biblical commentary of Yefet is still largely preserved in the Genizah writings, although in recent years parts thereof have been widely published.[5] In any event, the commentary on Gen 36, which includes the genealogical lists of Esau and of the kingdom of Edom, has not yet been published.[6]

The Integration of the Genealogical Lists of Esau and of the Kingdom of Edom in the Biblical Narrative

The biblical portion of *Vayishlaḥ* (Gen 32–36) unfolds with the dramatic story of Jacob's encounter with his brother Esau in the vicinity of the Jabbok River valley in Transjordan, and which by its modern identification emp-

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5. See *Rav Shemuel Ben Ḥofni's Commentary on the Pentateuch* [Hebrew], ed. Aharon Greenbaum (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook, 1979); Eliezer Schlossberg and Meira Polliack, eds., *Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary on Hosea* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2009); and Yair Zoran, ed., "Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary on Obadiah" [Hebrew], *Ginzei Qedem* 8 (2012): 129–95.

6. It is discussed here according to a photocopy of a manuscript that was kindly given to me by Prof. Meira Polliack of Tel Aviv University, who also supplied the following details: "Yefet's commentary on Gen 36 has survived in two good manuscripts. One is in the second Firkovitch Collection, now housed in the Russian National Library at St Petersburg: MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:23 [microfilm 53812 at the IMHM, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem]; and the other, in better and fuller shape, now housed in the National Library of France, Paris: MS BN 278 [microfilm 4326 at the IMHM, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem]. In this manuscript the original Judeo-Arabic text translated herein can be found on page 151 and following."

ties into the Jordan River near the Adam Bridge. The beginning of their
encounter is fraught with great tension and with Jacob's unrelenting fear of
Esau, although the episode has a happy ending. Jacob and Esau hug each
other, kiss, and cry upon each other's shoulders. Esau also refuses to accept
the gift offered to him by Jacob, and only after certain overtures does he
eventually accept the gift. Furthermore, Esau offers to Jacob a military
escort along the way, but Jacob gently turns down the offer with the argu-
ment that it would be an impediment to his progress as he slowly makes
the journey together with his entire entourage. Each of the two brothers
then turns to his separate way: Esau to the south toward Se'ir and Jacob
northward to Sukkot and to Shechem, places that lie on the western bank
of the Jordan River. Then, following the narrative of their encounter, there
comes another dramatic episode whose beginning is marked by tranquil-
ity; but, as the story unfolds and ends, it becomes very disturbing: this is
the story of Dinah in Shechem. Jacob is plagued with troubles. He flees for
fear of "the Canaanite inhabitants of the land." Deborah, the wet nurse of
Rebecca his mother, suddenly dies. Thereafter Rachel, his beloved wife,
dies while giving birth. Rueben, his eldest son, lies carnally with Bilhah,
his father's concubine. And finally, Isaac, Jacob's father, is gathered unto his
people. Jacob's afflictions do not end there, seeing that in the biblical por-
tion of *Vayeshev* (Gen 37–40) begins the tragic episode of Joseph and his
brothers, which actually spans the remaining sections of Genesis.

Then, at the end of the portion *Vayishlaḥ* (the whole of Gen 36),
between the hardships that Jacob has had to deal with after the incident
with Dinah in Shechem, and so on, as described above, and the story of
Joseph and his brothers, beginning with the start of *Vayeshev*, the biblical
narrative suddenly takes a turn and incorporates in a seemingly puzzling
manner a completely unusual matter—the detailed history of Esau and the
kings that descended from his posterity and who ruled over the land of
Edom, while specifically emphasizing that their kingdom was "before there
reigned any king over the Children of Israel" (Gen 36:31).[7] It is, of course,
possible to explain this in a way that cannot easily be refuted, namely, that
the narrative of the kings of Edom has come down in its proper place,
seeing that it comes after the Bible says of Isaac: "And his sons Esau and
Jacob buried him" (Gen 35:29). The *mudawwin* (the copyist or editor of

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7. Biblical citations in this essay follow a combination of the KJV and, when the
KJV presents a text too archaic for contemporary readers, the JPS 1985, even when
KJV is quoted in the bibliographical sources.

the Torah, in the language used by the Karaite Bible exegetes and by the Rabbanites of the tenth century)[8]—who sought to foreground the history of the people of Israel as being the main subject of interest in the Bible, meaning, the history of Jacob after the death of his father Isaac—saw fit to recuse himself at this place from the necessity of having to render a detailed account of Esau's history, and by giving rather a brief genealogical account of Esau's progeny. So, too, in this manner, has the *mudawwin* conducted himself with regard to the sons of Keṭurah, Abraham's wife, and with regard to Ishmael his son, at the end of the biblical portion *Chayei Sarah* (Gen 25). Similarly, in the book of Chronicles the *mudawwin* presented an abridged account of Esau's genealogy (1 Chr 1:35–54), after the universal genealogy to Abraham, Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah (vv. 1–33) according to Gen 10 and 25, which comes before the genealogy of the Judah tribe of Judah (chapters 2–4).

The Genealogical Lists of Esau and the
Kingdom of Edom in Midrashic Literature

As noted, the detailed genealogical lists of Esau and the kingdom of Edom have provoked a surprised response in rabbinic literature, as being something that is out of the ordinary and that is incompatible with the history of our forefathers. The main explanation given for this is the aggrandization of the name of Israel, God's chosen people, compared to the gentiles, while simultaneously pointing out the ethical differences in their conduct. The most detailed discussion of this matter is found in Tanḥ. Vayeshev 1:

> Alternatively: Why have the Scriptures endeavored to write down their genealogy? Was there nothing else that the Holy One, blessed be He, could have written, instead of the Duke of Timnaʻ, the Duke of Loṭan? Rather, it comes to teach you that from the beginning of the creation of the universe, the Holy One, blessed be He, has painstakingly traced the genealogy of idolaters and worshippers of the zodiac, so that they may have no recourse to a defense when mankind is informed about their origin and their vices.… To inform about their vices, in the sense that

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8. Meira Polliack, "'Scribe,' 'Redactor' and 'Author': The Multifaceted Concept of the Biblical Narrator (Mudawwin) in Medieval Karaite Exegesis" [Hebrew], in *Teʻudah 29, Yad Moshe: Studies in the History of the Jews in Islamic Lands Dedicated to the Memory of Moshe Gil*, ed. Yoram Erder, Elinoar Bareqet, and Meira Polliack (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv, 2018), 147–76.

one sees that they are the children of promiscuity. Wherefore it says, "the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Ṣepho, and Gaʿtam, Qenaz, and Timnaʿ and ʿAmaleq" (1 Chr 1:36), "And Timnaʿ was the concubine of Eliphaz" (Gen 36:12), showing that he married his own daughter.… And since all of them were the children of promiscuity, the Scriptures have singled them out to make known their vices. However, as for Israel, the Holy One, blessed be He, has drawn them near to him, and has called them [his] "lot" and [his] "inheritance," and [his] "portion," as it says: "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance" (Deut 32:9).… Allegorically, it is compared to a king who had a gemstone cast out into the dirt and into the gravel. The king had to search in the dirt and in the gravel to retrieve the gemstone from them. When the king finally reached the gemstone, he put aside the dirt and the gravel and occupied himself only with the gemstone. In this manner the Holy One, blessed be He, has concerned himself with former generations, including them all, but then laid them aside.… When he reached the gemstones that are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he began to be occupied with them. For this reason, the section which treats on the dukes of the sons of Esau has been juxtaposed against this section.[9]

Another exegesis that presents the same general thought is brought down in Gen. Rab. 82:14 on Gen 36:

Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai said: Why is it that I must expound and say, "And Timnaʿ was the concubine of Eliphaz?" It comes to make known the praise of our father Abraham's house, to what extent the kingdoms and rulers wanted to be joined to him. And what was Loṭan? He was one of the rulers.

Certainly these homilies contain within them a related reference to the kingdom of Rome, concerning which the sages of Israel have identified with Esau, as in the legends about the destruction in b. Git. 57b: "The hands are the hands of Esau: this refers to the wicked kingdom that destroyed our Temple, and that burnt our edifice, and that exiled us from our country." The first midrash alludes to the mass-proselytization movement that swept across Rome after the destruction of the Second Temple, whereas the second expresses an apologetic polemic with the Roman kingdom.

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9. The Tanḥuma translations are from *Midrash Tanḥuma* (New York: Horev, 1924); all translations are mine.

The Purpose of the Genealogical Lists of Esau and the Kingdom of Rome in Saʿadia Gaon's Writings

In at least three places in his works, Saʿadia treats the different aspects of the biblical narrative in terms of their literary genre:[10] (1) in his introduction to the commentary on Genesis, related to a question that he raised, he wrote (translated from Judeo-Arabic): "And if a man should ever ask and say if the order that accompanies the composition is so important, why do we not find in this book, meaning to say in the Torah, the commandments and the legal rulings grouped together and arranged in chapters, and divided into individual parts and ranked according to their status? Instead, we see them scattered and haphazardly arranged";[11] (2) in the sixth essay of the *Book on Beliefs and Opinions* (3:6), in the matter dealing with scriptural references of "God commanded" and where "God warns" against doing a certain thing;[12] and (3) in his introduction to his commentary on the Psalms.[13]

Saʿadia's need to express this issue on three separate occasions, and especially his presentation of his position as an answer to a general question as to the purpose of the narrative parts that are included in the Bible—with the exception of those parts that contain the commandments—shows that he is actually responding to questions that were being asked in the contemporaneous Jewish world about the content, structure, and manner in which the Bible was written. There is no doubt that in his long and detailed response, Saʿadia answers those questions somewhat apologetically. Without referring to the specific *responsa* of the sages earlier alluded to, regarding the integration of the genealogical lists of Esau and the kingdom of Edom, Saʿadia actually adopts in principle the method of the sages in all his discussions on this question, to wit, that even the

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10. Cf. Eliezer Schlossberg, "The Methods of Education According to Rav Saʿadia Gaon," in *Streams of Love (Yuvle Ahava), In Loving Memory of Yuval Hayman*, ed. Yosef Yuval Tobi, Shmuel Glick, and Renée Levine Melammed (Jerusalem: published by the family, 2016), 55–68.

11. Zucker, *Rav Saadya's Commentary on Genesis*, 167.

12. Yosef Qafiḥ, ed., *Beliefs and Opinions* [Hebrew] (New York: Yeshiva University, 1970), 129–31.

13. Yosef Qafiḥ, ed., *Rav Saadya's Commentary on Psalms* [Hebrew] (New York: American Academy for Jewish Studies, 1966), 19–21.

narrative parts of the Bible that do not contain commandments have a moral lesson to tell. Thus, we read in his commentary on the Psalms:

> And the third part [of the five biblical literary genres] is the narrative.… A narrative about people who had been aggrandized, as the accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were narrated in the Pentateuch. And the intention of that was to oblige us to be like them.… However, the purpose of the narrative about the accounts of people who had been condemned was to prevent us from doing like their deeds. This is in reference to what is mentioned in the Pentateuch regarding the spies, and regarding those who complained and regarding the men who have joined in worshiping the Baʿal of Peʿor.… The aim of those two parts is the same, as it is known by God that people need to be guided by events; for this reason, he threatened them with these narratives.[14]

However, in the *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, he presented a less pious and traditionalistic stance:

> And now I shall explain the matter of the Holy Scriptures and say that, for us, it is less understood than what it used to be in times past, [specifically] things that we should be educated by them to be obedient to him, and which he included in his book, and has added thereto his commandments, and after that the rewards that he would give them. All this has become lasting benefit to future generations, namely, that all the books of the prophets and books of the sages belonging to all peoples [an allusion to the Qurʾān?!]; in spite of their abundance, they contain three basic elements: the first in importance are the commands and admonitions, and they are one and the same; the second—the reward and punishment, which are likened unto their fruit; and the third, the episodic narrative, describing the person that acted uprightly on earth and succeeded, and the person who corrupted his ways therein and perished; for any instruction can only be had with these three things.
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> And I have seen fit to mention specific instances relating to the veracity of the biblical narrative. Had it not been for the fact that the soul accepts that there exists in the world a genuine story, no man would hope for what he regularly hopes for after being informed about the success that he can have at a given mercantile venture, or the success that comes from the pursuit of a particular professional skill, seeing that man's strength and his needs are dependent upon his possessions. He

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14. *Commentary on the Psalms*, 19–21. Here and in what follows the translation is mine from the original Judeo-Arabic.

would not even fear what he is being warned against, such as the danger of going out on a certain road, or at his being warned to avoid a certain action.[15]

Indeed, also in the third element there is moral lesson to be learned, albeit not in a religious, faith-based, or ethical context but rather in the context of one's economic well-being and of one's personal safety. This trend of being detached from the pure religious context is reinforced in Saʿadia's introduction to his commentary on Genesis, in which a simplistic approach to biblical interpretation emerges. Saʿadia counts eighteen matters in the Bible which are divided into three groups: (1) eight matters "that are connected to the [biblical] commandments and to the admonitions, which are the essence of the Torah"; (2) "seven [matters] that are one level below them," and whose relevance here is mainly to the narrative part of the Bible, whose usefulness is similar to the third element he spoke about in his introduction to Psalms; and (3) "the three last [matters] are at the lowest level, but these too have benefit, since it is impossible for the Torah to contain useless things."[16] By his words, in which he details these three elements, Saʿadia implies that in the Bible there exist details about which there is no readily understood ethical meaning, only the imparting of historical knowledge whose benefit is to improve the individual's personality and feelings:

> The first of the last three to complete the eighteen are events which merely give us a time reference. They have been made known unto us because he (God) was cognizant of the fact that people would be delighted and encouraged by knowing the number of years that have transpired since the creation of the universe until their own day. In addition, he has made known unto us their parts and their periods: such-and-such years from a particular generation, unto a particular generation, so that it might rest in our thoughts like a candle that illuminates and as a station that comprises one part of time before transitioning into a second part of time, just as everyone who has ever studied the Torah feels within his soul.
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> The second of the last three deals with family genealogy, such as how the Scriptures have traced the patristic lineage of the seventy nations to the three sons of Noah, as also the lineage of Abraham and Ishmael,

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15. *Beliefs and Opinions*, 129–31.
16. *Commentary on Genesis*, 175–80.

and of Jacob and Esau. The blessed Creator knew that men would find solace at knowing these genealogies, since our soul demands of us to know them, so that mankind will be cherished by us as a tree that has been planted by God in the earth, whose branches have spread out and dispersed eastward and westward, northward and southward, in the habitable part of the earth. It also has the dual function of allowing us to see the multitude as a single individual, and the single individual as a multitude. Along with this, man ought to contemplate also on the names of the countries and of the cities.

The third of the last three deals with the number of people who are mentioned therein, of which the children of Israel are enumerated in four distinct places. The advantage by what we have been able to understand (in this matter) is that one may know how the people had multiplied after it had been a few in number, as it is written: "All the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were seventy," and so on (Gen 46:27). Moreover, that we may know just how great the multitude of people was who had seen the miracles of the messenger, and who had actually heard the words of God who spoke on the mountain, as it is written: "And all the people saw the thunderings," and so on (Exod 20:18). So, too, that we may know what great number of people were conducted (by God) in mercy and who gave to them a leader, and who supplied for them food and sustenance, as it is written: "The people are six hundred thousand footmen," and so on (Num 11:21), as well as all similar things. To this also belongs the number of spoils taken during war, as it is written: "Take the sum of the prey that was taken," and so on (Num 31:26); and the number of dedicated offerings given to the tabernacle, as it is written: "This is the sum [donation] of the tabernacle," and so on (Exod 38:21). For [a memorial of] these things, and things similar (in the Bible), there are rational reasons that I shall explain in the book, God willing.[17]

The Purpose of the Genealogical Lists of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom in Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary on Genesis

Yefet ben ʿEli the Levite, the renowned Karaite commentator and a young contemporary of Saʿadia, explains in great detail and with a clear rational-historical approach all the individual scenes described in Gen 36. However, in doing so, he also presents a historiosophical approach that incorporates national and faith-based ideas, aimed at repeatedly expressing contempt for Esau and his descendants, as opposed to the lavish praises he heaps

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17. *Commentary on Genesis*, 180.

upon Jacob and his household. Nevertheless, the fact that there is a synthesis between Esau's genealogical list and that of the kingdom of Edom is explained by reasons related purely to good editing.

> Before he [the *mudawwin*] begins the story of Joseph, which narrative continues unto Israel's descent into Egypt, he wrote down the genealogy of Esau, since it was not comely to stop in the middle of such narrative and to interject his genealogy. In this manner, he was able to convey Esau's genealogy near the same place where he conveyed Jacob's genealogy.[18]

Editing considerations also play a role for Yefet when explaining the difference between the integration of Esau's genealogical list and that of the kingdom of Edom in Genesis and in 1 Chronicles:

> Now this stands in contrast to the way in which he edited in the book of Chronicles (1 Chr 1:43–54), wherein he put Esau's genealogy before Jacob's genealogy. The reason for which is clear, being that he wanted to begin with Jacob, and therefore dealt with tribe after tribe, discussing his family's genealogy unto the end, which is the purpose of the book. He put first the genealogy of Esau since it was brief [as also with regard to the detailed account in the book of Genesis], and since it is not comely to write it in the genealogy that treats the family of Jacob. Notwithstanding, here [in the book of Genesis] he put the genealogy of Jacob first for the first of the two reasons that I have written.

As already noted, words of denigration to Esau are repeated often in Yefet's commentary on Gen 36. Thus in the place that reads "Esau is Edom" (v. 1), he states that it was said by way of mockery, seeing that this nickname derives from what he said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that red red pottage" (Gen 25:30). In this manner, in what was said concerning the wives of Esau, that they were "from the daughters of Canaan" (Gen 36:2), the intent here is to show the difference between him and Jacob: Jacob married women from his father's family, as opposed to Esau who took wives from the daughters of Canaan, for which the Scriptures hold him in contempt.

Yefet presents a rational explanation, coupled with words of praise for the land of Israel, along with a somewhat nationalistic proclamation, when commenting on 36:7, "And the land where they sojourned could not bear them because of their cattle":

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18. For the Yefet MS used for the translation here, see n. 6.

His intent here is not to the entire land of Israel, but rather that place where they had their dwelling, seeing that the land of Israel is broad, capable of providing for all the tribes completely, and certainly was able to provide for Jacob and Esau. Even when Esau saw that he had no choice but to be separated from his brother, he left his place and went to Mount Se'ir, for two reasons: the first, because he knew that he had no portion in the land of Canaan, and that it belonged to Jacob; the second, he was well-pleased with his dwelling place in the region of Se'ir, insofar that he had already gone there and acquired for himself a place, having distanced himself completely from the Holy Land. For us, this matter was accentuated that we might know that God prevented him from dwelling in his land, and that he would have a portion in it, as it says: "And Esau I have hated" (Mal 1:3).

Yefet was also troubled by the fact that the land of Israel was given over to a foreign ruler, the Muslims, which made him take advantage of the narrative about Esau in this chapter to state that God strengthens one people over another people:

Dukes belonging to the indigenous inhabitants of Se'ir did not cease to exist in their places until Esau and his children took leave of their place and went unto them. After some time, the sons of Esau made war with them [the indigenous inhabitants of the land], and killed them and inherited their country and dwelt therein, as he says: "The Horites formerly dwelt in Se'ir; but the children of Esau succeeded them," and so on (Deut 2:12). [The *mudawwin*] has made it known that the Lord of the Universe had strengthened the sons of Esau over the inhabitants of Se'ir, until they uprooted them from their place, so as to fulfill the words of Isaac unto him, "See, your dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above" (Gen 27:39). In connection with this matter he has written for us the genealogy of the sons of Se'ir, that we might know that the Lord of the Universe strengthens one nation over another, until they have conquered their country and dwell therein, just as he strengthened the sons of Esau over the inhabitants of Se'ir, and in the same way strengthened Moab and Ammon over the Rephaim until they took from them their country and dwelt there.

In his commentary on Gen 36:31, "And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel," Yefet presents the different views regarding how much earlier in time the kingdom of Edom had reigned than that recorded for the kingdom of Israel, based on different chronological tables that can be adduced from

the Scriptures, and without any moral or ethical motivation for saying so, except for acquiring historical knowledge alone—similar to what we have found in the words of Saʿadia concerning the genealogical lists of Ishmael and Esau. In his later remarks, however, he points to the great difference between the grandeur and more spiritual kingdom of Israel and that belonging to the kingdom of Edom:

> He has mentioned concerning them eight kings, announcing that one reigned after the other, as it says: "And so-and-so died." He has also made it known that each one came from a different city, excepting Baʿal Ḥanan alone, where, regarding him, the name of his city has not been mentioned, and perhaps came from the land of Shaʾul. In addition, he has informed us that each reigning king was not the son of his predecessor, by which we learn that their kingdom was not a kingdom sanctioned by heaven, as it is with the kings of the house of David, and where each one of them reigned after his father, and all of them from one city, meaning, Jerusalem. As for the others, each one of them overcame the other and reigned in his stead. The son of the deceased king never reigned in his father's stead, but there came another potentate from a different city who became victorious through the sword and reigned in his stead, to fulfill the words of Isaac: "And by your sword you shall live" (Gen 27:40). It was on this account, therefore, that Moses (may peace be upon him) explained to us their ever-changing countries and their genealogies.

The national trend with respect to the land of Israel belonging to the people of Israel, broadly construed, emerges from the concluding section in Yefet's commentary on the chapter:

> Afterwards, he says: "These are the dukes of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession" (Gen 36:43), which comes to inform us that that country was given to them as a possession, and that the sons of Esau would inherit it generation after generation, as it says: "For I have given Mount Seʿir to Esau for a possession" (Deut 2:5), and it shall not cease from being their inheritance in the future, when Israel shall invade them and not leave for them a living soul, as it says: "And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau chaff, and they shall set them on fire and consume them, and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau" (Obad 18). After which, they shall destroy their country and not leave in it any trace unto them, while its portion will remain eternally destroyed,

as it says [in a prophecy concerning Mount Seʿir], "I will make of you perpetual desolations, and your cities shall not return" (Ezek 35:9); whereas, as for his portion, being its uttermost parts, Israel shall inherit it, as it says: "And Edom shall be a possession, Seʿir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel will be triumphant" (Num 24:18). And he says elsewhere: "And they of the Negev shall possess the mount of Esau" (Obad 19).

The Purpose of the Genealogical List of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom in the Commentary of Samuel ben Ḥofni on Genesis

Nothing has remained from the commentary by Samuel ben Ḥofni on Gen 36 except a small fragment. At any rate, most of his words have been copied from the commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli, including the explanation which in principle is the editing considerations with regard to the integration of the genealogical lists of Esau and the kingdom of Esau in that particular place in the biblical text. With that said, there is some novelty in his comment: he contends that this happens to be the way of scribes, a comment that stems from a new perception that infiltrated the literature of Israel at the time, namely that a work is created and constructed upon the basis of a logical structure:

> And since the purpose sought in these essays was to inform us about the status of good gentry, meaning to say, Jacob and his offspring, he began by mentioning the kings of Esau and shortened it, in order to distinguish him and that he might begin anew with a description of the genealogy of Jacob with an explanation and with a detail, and thus do they who are the … by applying them to a part where it lends nothing to its purpose, and where they shorten it and abandon it. Afterwards, they expand in a chapter that has more to do with its purpose and their intended object. Now, in this manner, because its purpose was to clarify the genealogy of Shem, he forwarded the matter and says of him: "These are the generations of the sons of Noah; Shem, Ḥam, and Japheth" (Gen 10:1). Afterwards he says: "These are the generations of Shem" (Gen 11:10). In the same way he says: "And these are the generations of Ishmael the son of Abraham" (Gen 25:12), and later he says by way of a protracted declaration: "And these are the generations of Isaac, the son of Abraham" (Gen 25:19).[19]

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19. *Rav Shemuel Ben Ḥofni's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, 74.

The Purpose of the Genealogical Lists of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom in Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*

In the *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:50), Maimonides relates to the narrative parts of the Bible, in harsh critical reaction against those who do not interpret the Torah's words in the correct manner and perhaps even against those who cancel the value of those words altogether. In this context, it is incumbent upon us to mention his harsh statement concerning the verse "And the sister of Loṭan was Timnaʻ" (Gen 36:22), an individual case drawn from the genealogical list of Esau. For Maimonides there is to be found therein a sacred and virtuous status that is no less significant than that of the Ten Commandments:

> There are in the Law portions which include deep wisdom, but have been misunderstood by many persons; they require, therefore, an explanation. I mean the narratives contained in the Law which many consider as being of no use whatever; that is, the list of the various families descended from Noah, with their names and their territories (Gen 10); the sons of Seʻir the Ḥorite (36:20–30); the kings that reigned in Edom (from v. 31); and the like. There is a saying of our Sages (b. Sanh. 99b) that the wicked king Manasseh frequently held disgraceful meetings for the sole purpose of criticizing such passages of the Law. "He held meetings and made blasphemous observations on Scripture, saying, 'Had Moses nothing else to write than, And the sister of Loṭan was Timnaʻ.'" (36:22).[20]

Generally speaking, Maimonides follows in the footsteps of Saʻadia regarding the importance of the narrative parts of the Bible, which, in essence, detail the religious and moral lessons that are to be learned:

> Every narrative in the Law serves a certain purpose in connection with religious teaching. It either helps to establish a principle of faith, or to regulate our actions, and to prevent wrong and injustice among men.…
> The accounts of the flood (Gen 6–8) and of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19) serve as an illustration of the doctrine that "indeed, there is a reward for the righteous; indeed, He is a God that judges on earth" (Ps 58:12). The narration of the war among the nine kings (Gen 14) shows how, by means of a miracle, Abraham, with a few

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20. Moses Mamonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer (New York: Dover, 1904), 380–81.

undisciplined men, defeated four mighty kings. It illustrates at the same time how Abraham sympathized with his relative (Lot), who had been brought up in the same faith, and how he exposed himself to the dangers of warfare in order to save him. We further learn from this narrative how contented and satisfied Abraham was, thinking little of property, and very much of good deeds; he said, "I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet" (Gen 14:23)....

Of this kind is the enumeration of the stations [of the Israelites in the wilderness] (Num 33). At first sight it appears to be entirely useless; but in order to obviate such a notion Scripture says, "And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the Lord" (Num 33:2). It was indeed most necessary that these should be written. For miracles are only convincing to those who witnessed them; whilst coming generations, who know them only from the account given by others, may consider them as untrue. But miracles cannot continue and last for all generations; it is even inconceivable [that they should be permanent]. Now the greatest of the miracles described in the Law is the stay of the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years, with a daily supply of manna. This wilderness, as described in Scripture, consisted of places "wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water" (Deut 8:15); places very remote from cultivated land, and naturally not adapted for the habitation of man, "It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates, neither is there any water to drink" (Num 20:5); "A land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt" (Jer 2:6). [In reference to the stay of the Israelites in the wilderness], Scripture relates, "Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink" (Deut 19:5). All these miracles were wonderful, public, and witnessed by the people. But God knew that in future people might doubt the correctness of the account of these miracles. in the same manner as they doubt the accuracy of other narratives; they might think that the Israelites stayed in the wilderness in a place not far from inhabited land, where it was possible for man to live [in the ordinary way]; that it was like those deserts in which Arabs live at present; or that they dwelt in such places in which they could plow, sow, and reap, or live on some vegetable that was growing there; or that manna came always down in those places as an ordinary natural product; or that there were wells of water in those places. In order to remove all these doubts and to firmly establish the accuracy of the account of these miracles, Scripture enumerates all the stations, so that coming generations may see them, and learn the greatness of the miracle which enabled human beings to live in those places forty years.[21]

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21. *Guide for the Perplexed*, 381–83.

Still, regarding the genealogical lists of Esau and the kingdom of Edom, Maimonides reveals an innovative approach. Unlike his predecessors, he does not make the matter contingent upon any ideologically-based, religious-moral lessons to be learned, nor on matters relating to good editing practices, but rather on a practical-halakhic approach—namely, the need to bolster the commandment calling out for the destruction of Amalek, without accidentally including all the descendants of Esau and Seʿir:

> The list of the families of Seʿir and their genealogy is given in the Law (Gen 36:20–36), because of one particular commandment. For God distinctly commanded the Israelites concerning Amalek to blot out his name (Deut 25:17–19). Amalek was the son of Eliphas and Timnaʿ, the sister of Loṭan (Gen 36:12). The other sons of Esau were not included in this commandment. But Esau was by marriage connected with the Seʿrites, as is distinctly stated in Scripture: and Seʿrites were therefore his children: he reigned over them; his seed was mixed with the seed of Seʿir, and ultimately all the countries and families of Seʿir were called after the sons of Esau who were the predominant family, and they assumed more particularly the name Amalekites, because these were the strongest in that family. If the genealogy of these families of Seʿir had not been described in full they would all have been killed, contrary to the plain words of the commandment. For this reason, the Seʿrite families are fully described, as if to say, the people that live in Seʿir and in the kingdom of Amalek are not all Amalekites: they are the descendants of some other man, and are called Amalekites because the mother of Amalek was of their tribe. The justice of God thus prevented the destruction of an [innocent] people that lived in the midst of another people [doomed to extirpation]; for the decree was only pronounced against the seed of Amalek.[22]

Moreover, from the second part of the chapter, which details the names of the kings of Edom, Maimonides learns an important political lesson and connects it to the biblical command, "You may not set a stranger over you, who is not your brother" (Deut 17:15). According to him, mentioning each king's hometown comes to teach us that these were not the sons of Esau, but rather kings of another nation whom they had set over themselves, and that these kings "meddled with the sons of Esau and subdued them." There is no evidence from the Scriptures to support such claims; however, Maimonides concludes that one must learn a lesson from the

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22. *Guide for the Perplexed*, 381–82.

deeds of Esau's progeny, and not set a king over the people who comes from another nation:

> The kings that have reigned in the land of Edom are enumerated (Gen 36:51, seq.) on account of the law, "you may not set a stranger over you, which is not your brother" (Deut 17:15). For of these kings none was an Edomite; wherefore each king is described by his native land; one king from this place, another king from that place. Now I think that it was then well known how these kings that reigned in Edom conducted themselves, what they did, and how they humiliated and oppressed the sons of Esau. Thus God reminded the Israelites of the fate of the Edomites, as if saying unto them, Look unto your brothers, the sons of Esau, whose kings were so and so.[23]

Conclusion

On the whole, five reasons are listed by medieval scholars in their discussions on the genealogical lists of Esau and the kingdom of Edom in the biblical section of *Vayishlaḥ*:

1. a moral-religious lesson;
2. a mark of distinction between the people of Israel and the gentiles;
3. good editing practices;
4. a way to impart historical knowledge; and
5. a way to bolster the commandment calling out for the destruction of Amalek.

Nearly all of the scholars whose work has been presented here concur with the first three reasons, which have already been conveyed in the writings of talmudic sages, although not in an abstract, or formulaic, principle. The reason of bolstering the biblical commandment to destroy the Amalekite nation is unique to Maimonides, and perhaps it should be viewed as some kind of humanistic approach. It seems, however, that the more interesting innovations that characterize the spirit of the tenth century in the Judeo-Arabic cultural context in the East are those which take into account editing considerations in what was relayed in the name of Samuel

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23. *Guide for the Perplexed*, 382.

ben Ḥofni, and the idea of imparting historical knowledge which brings a sense of satisfaction to humans by means of expanding their general knowledge, as described by Saʿadia in his introduction to his commentary on Genesis.

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Sa'adia Gaon's Commentary on Exodus 32:1–6: Why Did Aaron Agree to Build the Golden Calf?

Arye Zoref

Introduction

Sa'adia Gaon probably started writing his commentary on the Pentateuch at a later stage of his life and therefore never completed it. In many ways, his commentary on the Pentateuch reveals the insights and experience that Sa'adia had acquired during his life-long work as a biblical commentator. His commentary on the story of the golden calf demonstrates his creativity as a commentator and his spirit of innovation. Sa'adia's innovative commentaries on several biblical texts have stimulated the exegetical discussion over the centuries, but in many cases his suggestions were rejected by later commentators for being overly creative.

The translation of the text below is based on the Judeo-Arabic original according to Yehuda Ratzabi's edition.[1] Biblical quotations are translated according to the New Living Translation (NLT). The words in square brackets are completions and clarifications added by me.

The discussion includes quotations from several commentaries on Exodus in manuscripts:

- New York, Jewish Theological Seminary 8916. F49522 in the Jewish National Library. [David ben Bo'az]
- SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4531. F58215 in JNL. [Qirqisānī]
- SP IOS B 220. F69212 in JNL. [Yefet ben 'Eli]

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1. Yehuda Ratzabi, ed. *Saadya: Rav Saadya's Commentary on Exodus* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad harav Kook, 2013), 374–75.

◆   London, British Library Additions 19657, F8408 in JNL.
    [Ghazal ben Abi Srur]

Translation of Saʿadia's Commentary to Exodus 32:1–6

Some people say, however, and hopefully God is leading me toward the
truth, that the right way to understand this issue is this: Aaron complied
with the people's demand in order to test the people so that he could dis-
tinguish between those of them who belong [to the group of sinners] and
those who do not. The people crowded in front of him, as it is said: "They
gathered around Aaron"[2] (Exod 32:1), and Aaron knew that some of them
belong [to the group of sinners] and stubbornly adhere to their concept,
while others do not. This is the same as what happened in the story of Baal
of Peor. Some people [just] ate and drank, some people were whoring as
well, and others also worshiped idols, as it is said: "While Israel was staying
in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite
women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the
sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked them-
selves to the Baal of Peor" (Num 25:1–3). The same also happened in the
story of Achan, where it is said: "Israel has sinned; they have violated my
covenant" (Josh 7:11) [even though only one man—Achan—has sinned].
Aaron could not find any other way to distinguish [between sinners and
nonsinners] other than to comply with their demand, and also to build
an altar and declare: "Tomorrow will be a festival to the LORD!" (Exod
32:5). This story is similar to the story of Jehu, who wanted to cleanse
Israel of Baal's worship, as it is said: "Jehu was acting deceptively in order
to destroy the servants of Baal" (2 Kgs 10:19). He could only have done so
by encouraging people to worship Baal and by pretending to recognize it
[Baal], as it is said: "Then Jehu brought all the people together and said to
them, 'Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much'" (10:18). He
assembled Baal worshipers so that not one of them remained outside, as it
is said: "Then he sent word throughout Israel, and all the servants of Baal
came; not one stayed away" (10:21), and gave them as presents fancy suits,
as it is said: "And Jehu said to the keeper of the wardrobe, 'Bring robes for
all the servants of Baal'" (10:22). Jehu ordered to conduct a search and
make sure that not one of God's believers is among them, as it is said: "Jehu

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2. Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical translations are from the NLT.

said to the servants of Baal, 'Look around and see that no one who serves the Lord is here with you—only servants of Baal'" (10:23). He did not kill them until they prayed to Baal as it was customary to pray to him according to their religion, as it is said: "Jehu said, 'Call an assembly in honor of Baal.' So they proclaimed it" (10:20). They even offered sacrifices according to their custom, as it is said: "As soon as Jehu had finished making the burnt offering, he ordered the guards and officers, 'Go in and kill them'" (10:25). God was not angry with him for allowing them to worship Baal and offering sacrifices to him, but, on the contrary, he praised him for that, as we can see at the end of the story, where it is said: "you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes" (10:30). The story of Aaron is no doubt similar to the story of Jehu, and what is said at the end of the story: "Moses saw that the people were running wild" (Exod 32:25) supports the notion that Aaron wanted to test them. If so, if the story of Aaron is similar to the story of Jehu, why was Aaron not praised like Jehu was, but rather we find that his act resulted in [God] being angry at him: "the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him" (Deut 9:20)? The reason is that Jehu smote them after the sacrifice while Aaron did not, but waited until Moses came down from the mountain, because he believed it to be the best course of action.

Discussion

Aaron's role in the story of the golden calf has been hard to understand for Bible readers all through the ages. How could the prophet Aaron, Moses's brother and the founder of the priestly dynasty, participate in the act of idol worship? Moreover, biblical narrative describes Aaron not only as a participant, but also as the key figure in creating the calf. This story was even more problematic for Jews in Sa'adia's time (tenth century CE) because they were influenced by the Islamic concept of "Infallibility of the Prophets" (*'Iṣmat al-Anbiya*), which means that prophets cannot commit a sin, at least not a major sin. Can one really consider the building of the calf a minor sin?!

Sa'adia was familiar with two explanations that tried to solve this problem. One is the traditional explanation found in rabbinic literature (Tanḥ. Ki Tisa' 19), according to which Aaron simply feared for his life. This explanation relies on the fact that Hur is mentioned as the leader of the people of Israel in Moses's absence, together with Aaron (Exod 24:14), but is not mentioned in the story of the golden calf. Where did he vanish

to? According to the midrashic completion, which has no trace or mention in the biblical text, Hur was murdered by the people who demanded to build the calf, and Aaron was afraid that he would be murdered too, and therefore he complied with their demand and built the calf. Saʿadia rejected this explanation on the ground that Hur's murder is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. It should be noted that Saʿadia respected rabbinic tradition, but he did not follow it blindly.

A second explanation was that Aaron did not mean to build a calf at all. He intended and started to build something else, but someone intervened in the middle of the building process and turned it into a calf. There are several versions of this explanation. One can be found in the Qur'an, which mentions that a certain Samaritan (Arab. *al-samiri*) built the calf (Q Ta-ha 20:93–87). According to another suggestion, reflected in [relatively late] rabbinic sources (Tanḥ. Ki Tisa' 19), Micah, the creator of Micah's idol (Judg 17:4), is the person who managed to turn Aaron's creation into a calf. A similar type of explanation is found in the work of the Karaite David ben Boʿaz, a later contemporary of Saʿadia, who did not pinpoint a specific biblical figure, but rather suggested that it was the artisan who was in charge of the construction who shaped the object into a calf, not Aaron; he argued that this explains Aaron's specific wording, when explaining himself to Moses: "I simply threw it into the fire—and out came this calf!" (Exod 32:24).[3] Saʿadia presents this latter explanation in a manner that deliberately ridicules it and distorts it: "Some people say that this Aaron was not Moses' brother, but some goldsmith whose name was Aaron." Against these options and for his own part, Saʿadia insists that such an act like building the calf could only have been committed by the leader of the people, namely, by Aaron the brother of Moses himself. Saʿadia apparently believed that the people would never have dared to build it and worship it without Aaron's consent and active participation, so there is no point in arguing that the calf was shaped by someone else.

After Saʿadia rejects the existing explanations for Aaron's behavior, he has to come up with an explanation of his own in order to exonerate Aaron. However, he could not exonerate Aaron completely, because Moses (and according to Deut 9:20, also God) had clearly disapproved of Aaron's actions. Therefore, Saʿadia constructs an argument that consists of two parts: in the first part, he explains why Aaron's actions were intended

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3. MS NY JTS 8916, F49522 in the Jewish National Library, 94b.

for the best; and in the second part, he explains why they were still a sin after all.

In order to demonstrate that Aaron had only good intentions at heart, Sa'adia turns to another biblical story, the story of Jehu and the worshipers of Baal. Jehu had called for a feast in Baal's honor and actually encouraged people to worship Baal by granting gifts and prizes (2 Kgs 10:19–22). He even offered a sacrifice during this feast, which was probably conducted according to customs of idol worshipers. There is no hint in the biblical narrative that Jehu was rebuked by the prophets for this behavior. Are Aaron's actions in building the calf really that different? According to Sa'adia, Jehu's intention was good: he wanted to assemble all Baal's worshippers in one place so they could be distinguished from God's believers and then be killed. Why can we not assume that Aaron's intention was similar? Sa'adia insists that even though the Bible says that "the people of Israel" wanted to build the calf, it does not necessarily mean that *all* the people of Israel supported this action. On the contrary: Sa'adia cites other biblical stories in which the text mentions that "the people have sinned," but the sin was actually committed by a few. Therefore, Aaron's action was intended as a way to distinguish between sinners and nonsinners and was not meant to provoke idol worship among the people.

The second part of Sa'adia's argument is meant to explain why Aaron's actions were still a sin after all. In this part he bases himself on the difference between the two stories, that of Jehu and that of Aaron. Jehu set his troops in motion even before the feast for Baal had begun, and the moment he was sure that only Baal's worshipers were in the hall, he sent his troops in to kill them. Aaron, on the other hand, has done nothing, but let the idol worshipers do as they please. Sa'adia explains that Aaron thought it best to wait until Moses had come down from the mountain. Why? Sa'adia does not mention any reason, because apparently there was no good reason. This was Aaron's sin. It is not a terrible sin, just a misguided tactical decision. Nevertheless, this decision had grave (and unfathomable) consequences, in as much as Aaron could foresee: Israel's camp was ruled by idol worshipers who practiced their rites, without anyone standing in their way.

Is this a convincing explanation for Aaron's behavior? Judging by the response of Sa'adia contemporaries, the answer is no. Qirqisānī and Yefet ben 'Eli, Karaite commentators from the tenth century as well, vehemently rejected Sa'adia's interpretation, and especially the first part of his argument.

Qirqisānī raises two arguments against this interpretation. First, if this was really the reason why Aaron built the calf, why did he not mention this when he tried to justify his actions to Moses (Exod 32:22–24)? Second, Aaron could see with his own eyes who were the people who came to him and demanded that the calf be built, and who were those who did not express this demand. Why did he need to devise tests and experiments?[4]

Yefet too raises two objections against Saʿadia's interpretation. First, there is a big difference between Jehu's actions and Aaron's actions. Jehu indeed declared that he wants to worship Baal, but did not actually worship it himself. Aaron, on the other hand, actually built an idol. Second, according to biblical law, a person who incites other persons to worship idols is condemned to death (Deut 13:7–12). If Aaron could claim that he only built the calf in order to test the people and see who would worship it, why can the inciter not do the same?[5]

The second part of Saʿadia's argument was received much more positively. Both Yefet and David ben Boʿaz agreed that Aaron's sin was not the building of the calf. David ben Boʿaz claimed that Aaron did not intend to build the calf, and Yefet claimed that Aaron was threatened by the idol worshipers and feared for his life. His sin was that he failed to organize the believers of God and fight the idol worshipers, as Moses did later.[6]

Saʿadia's interpretation of the calf story had better success in Samaritan circles. Ṣadaqa b. Munajja, a Samaritan commentator from the thirteenth century (quoted by Ghazal ben Abi Srur, a Samaritan commentator of the eighteenth century) presented the same arguments about Aaron and the calf that Saʿadia did. Ṣadaqa did not mention the story of Jehu, because the Samaritans sanctify the biblical books of the Pentateuch only; however, other than that his argument is the same. It should be noted, however, that this interpretation met resistance in other Samaritan circles. Ghazal ben Abi Srur, after mentioning Ṣadaqa's opinion, stated simply: "The honorable Ṣadaqa is mistaken on this issue."[7]

All in all, it seems that Saʿadia's contemporaries and later commentators felt that Saʿadia's interpretation was based on theological and apologetical considerations (that is, his will to defend Aaron) and not on a careful and close reading of the biblical text. Moreover, his defense is not even a suit-

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4. MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4531, F58215 in JNL, 183b.
5. MS SP IOS B 220, F69212 in JNL, 59b-60b.
6. MS NY JTS 8916, F49522 in JNL, 94b; MS SP IOS B 220, F69212 in JNL, 61a.
7. MS Lon BL Add 19657, F8408 in JNl, 78a.

able defense for Aaron. Describing Aaron as caving in to pressure on the part of idol worshipers is bad enough; but describing Aaron as if he were plotting a grand scheme in order to flash out sinners, a plot that ended in nothing more than an orgy of sinful acts, is in many ways worse. Sa'adia's astute medieval readers clearly felt that it is better for Aaron to be blamed for caving under pressure than for intentionally instigating idol worship.

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The Entry *g[a]d* in Al-Fāsī's Dictionary *Kitāb Jāmiʿ al-Alfāẓ*: Lexicography, Commentary, and Grammar

Esther Gamliel-Barak

Introduction

At the end of the ninth century CE and during the tenth, several dictionaries were written specifically for the Hebrew words of the Bible, introducing different methods of lexicography. The tenth-century Karaite David ben Abraham Alfāsī, the author of the dictionary *Kitāb Jāmiʿ al-Alfāẓ*, was innovative in the sphere of lexicography. In this essay I focus on the entry *gd* and show some of his innovations, such as presenting all the meanings of the entry and using many citations from the Bible which are connected to the word entry. Citations have a dual role: on the one hand, they prompt a certain meaning, whereas, on the other hand, they may support a meaning that has been established. Citations are also the basis for exegetical discussions, which are also characteristic of Alfāsī's dictionary work. From Alfāsī's exegetical discussions we can learn about the means by which he elucidated the biblical text. In the entry *gd*, Alfāsī uses two approaches: the context, and comparison to other Semitic languages. In many cases Alfāsī uses grammar as an exegetical tool; but, in this particular entry, he only discusses the change of vowels when using the radical root *gd* as a verb in the future tense. None of the entries in Alfāsī's dictionary are identical, neither in length nor in their extent of representing Alfāsī's semantic and exegetical methods. Each entry depends on the semantic and the exegetical difficulties that arise from the context of the biblical text, so there is no one entry which exactly embodies Alfāsī's semantic and exegetical methods. Nevertheless, the entry *gad* is one of the entries which most closely represents Alfāsī's methods. Below I will introduce Alfāsī's semantic and exegetical methods according to the entry *gd*.

Lexicographical Innovations

One of Alfāsī's lexicographical innovations is the presentation of all the meanings of an entry, including the metaphorical meanings. This is also seen in the entry *gd*. Alfāsī identified the different meanings of the word and decided that the definition will not be perfect without presenting them all to the dictionary user. The main meaning, although important, may not fit certain verses. Alfāsī wanted to give the dictionary user all the information that would help understand each word in every possible context. This method is an innovation: Saʻadia Gaon, in his *Ha-Agron*, usually presents only one common meaning.[1] Judah ibn Quraysh in his *Risāla* sometimes presents more than one meaning; but, unlike Alfāsī, whose purpose was to focus on a word and present all its meanings, ibn Quraysh's purpose was to distinguish between similar words that have different meanings.[2] For him, the meaning of a word as a principle was not a central issue. In Alfāsī's opinion, *gd* is a biradical root which, according to its occurrences in the Bible, has more than one meaning: (1) a horseman; (2) a knot; (3) coriander; (4) a cut or a wound; (5) speech; or (6) plenty of rainfall.

Another prominent characteristic in most of the entries is the expansive use of citations. This is also an innovation of Alfāsī: Saʻadia Gaon does not tend to bring in citations in *Ha-Agron*; and Menaḥem ben Saruq, although he brings in citations, in most cases does it without definitions, in other words, without generalization of meaning from several verses.[3] Citations have a double role: on the one hand, they prompt a certain meaning while, on the other hand, they may support a meaning that has already been established. The use of citations may also hint at Alfāsī's Karaite origin. Like other Karaite scripturalists who upheld the saying attributed to Anan ben David, "Search carefully in the Torah and do not rely on my opinion," Alfāsī's work is individualistic in nature. He introduces his own definitions, directs users to the relevant verses, and thus opens his work to discussion and learning. Obviously, Alfāsī did not intend to cite all the

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1. See Nehemiah Allony, *The Agron of Rav Saʻadia Gaon: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Academy of Hebrew Language, 1969).

2. See Dan Becker, *The Risāla of Judah Ben Quraysh: A Critical Edition* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1984).

3. Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *Menaḥem ben Saruq: Maḥberet* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1986).

occurrences of each word but only those which were relevant to other introduced meanings. This claim is strengthened by the fact that, in the second edition of his dictionary, Alfāsī reduced the amount of citations.

Citations are also the basis for exegetical discussions, which are also characteristic of Alfāsī's dictionary work. Alfāsī uses the meaning of the word *gad* as a horseman in Gen 30:11: "And Leah said, 'Good fortune!'[4] so she named him Gad" (Gen 30:11 NRSV). Alfāsī knew of (and introduced later) the other explanation of the word *gad* in this verse, which is "fortune" ("Good fortune has arrived"), but he discusses other verses at length to prove his explanation of *gad* as a horseman. In this discussion, Alfāsī mentions Jacob's blessing to his son Gad, which uses the verb form *yagud* (Gen 49:19) to show that the tribe of Gad will always be the defenders of the other Israelite tribes: they will be (at the front) or at the back against any enemy's attack—"but he shall raid at their heels."[5] Alfāsī also cites Moses's blessing of the Gad tribe ("lives like a lion," Deut 33:20) and Gad's description in the book of Chronicles ("whose faces were like the faces of lions," 1 Chr 12:9) to show that *gad* alludes to brave horsemen. He also uses the fact that the geographical dwelling place of the Gad tribe was Transjordan, which was separated from the dwellings of most of other Israelite tribes, to strengthen the characterization of the tribe of Gad as aggressive and courageous. Alfāsī adds that the Reuben and Manasseh tribes, who also lived in Transjordan, would not have been able to survive without having the tribe of Gad to defend them.

Alfāsī uses the meaning of the root *gd* as "cut" when explaining the word *yitgodad* in the verse, "there shall be no gashing [*yitgodad*], no shaving of the head for them" (Jer 16:6). Alfāsī asks an obvious question regarding this prophecy of Jeremiah: how could Jeremiah have proclaimed that there will be no gashing or shaving as punishment if gashing and shaving is in fact already forbidden in the Torah? Alfāsī's answer to this question is that, after the people of Israel commit their sins and the Lord punishes them by killing their young boys, they will not have the strength to continue committing these sins.

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4. Gad (someone strong, a horseman) has arrived. All biblical translations are from the NRSV.

5. The NRSV translation is different from Alfāsī's explanation. According to the NRSV here, the tribe of Gad will attack the enemy from behind.

Exegetical Means

From Alfāsī's exegetical discussions we can learn about the means by which he elucidated the biblical text. In the entry *gd*, Alfāsī uses two methods: looking at the context, and comparison with other Semitic languages such as Aramaic.

Using the Context

When using the context, as opposed to when using analogy, verses are not elucidated through comparison with verses anywhere in the Bible, but only with neighboring verses. Alfāsī mentions this method in his introduction to the dictionary, where he notes that sometimes verses may be explained by their context.[6] One of the goals in using this method is to explain difficult words or *hapax legomena* (words that occur only once within the Bible). Yefet ben ʿEli, the greatest Karaite exegete who lived in the tenth century, also uses this method.[7]

To indicate that a particular interpretation is based on the context, Alfāsī uses several Arabic terms. The main ones are *min al-mujāwara* (= "from the vicinity") and *min al-qarīna* (= "from the immediate context"), which is also used with a pronominal suffix, *min iqrānihi lahu*, and rarely *min al-maʿnā tuʾḥaḏ* (= "the meaning is learned from the immediate context").[8] In our text, the expression used is *biqarīnatihi* (= "because of the immediate context").

As was already mentioned, Alfāsī argues that the meaning of the name that Lea gave to her son is "horseman." He also thinks that this meaning fits the verse "who set a table for *gaḏ*" (Isa 65:11), but also introduces another meaning of *gad* as the name of a specific star. According to this explanation, the verse describes a situation of star-worship. Alfāsī notes that this meaning also exists in Arabic and Aramaic, but he prefers the former interpretation, since it reflects the immediate context of the verse (Arab. *biqarīnatihi*). The verse continues: "and fill cups of mixed wine for

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6. Solomon L. Skoss, *Kitāb Jāmiʿ Al-Alfāẓ (Agron) of David Ben Abraham Al-Fāsī*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 1:13, 2:265–69.

7. Yoram Erder, "Yefet b. ʿEli the Karaite on Morality Issues, in the Light of His Commentary on Exodus 3:21–22" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 7.22 (1999): 313–34.

8. *min al-mujāwara*: Skoss, *Kitāb*, 2:124:38; *min al-qarīna*: Skoss, *Kitāb*, 2:126:82; *min iqrānihi lahu*: Skoss, *Kitāb*, 2:386:31; *min al-maʿnā tuʾḥaḏ*: Skoss, *Kitāb*, 1:106:347.

Destiny."[9] Alfāsī explains these as the vessels and the drink which were prepared for the horsemen.[10]

From Alfāsī's exegetical discussions we learn that he introduced other exegetes' opinions as an important part in the process of determining the actual meaning of the biblical text. Other Karaites in his era did the same without mentioning the name of the exegete they quoted. According to Khan, this practice derived from the will to legitimate an opinion not due to the person who said it, but according to its merit. It may also have been done for pedagogical purposes—to encourage the examination of multiple views and exercise individual judgement.[11]

Comparison with Other Languages

Alfāsī compares Semitic languages as a commentary technique. Comparison to other Semitic languages was used by other lexicographers and exegetes to explain Hebrew or Aramaic words in the Bible, especially rare words or *hapax legomena*. This technique is based on the principle that Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic are similar in grammar, lexicon, and aspects of spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. Judah ibn Quraysh indicates that the similarity derives from vicinity and genealogy, that is, the geographical vicinity of the peoples who spoke Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic; and the genealogical connection: the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who spoke Hebrew; Yishmaʿel, Abraham's son, who spoke Arabic; and Terah, Abraham's father, who spoke Aramaic.[12] The comparison to other Semitic languages developed from literary and linguistic circumstances: the existence of Hebrew and Aramaic translations to the Bible, which emphasize the connection between Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic; the diglossia among Jews; and the use of Hebrew characters in Arabic writing.[13] In his comprehensive research *Comparative Semitic Phi-*

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9. The word "destiny" is according to the NRSV translation. In the MT we read: "… for *gad.*"

10. The meaning "vessel" for the word *mni* is perhaps derived from a comparison with Aramaic. See the next paragraph. Rashi, RaDak, Metsudat David, and ʾIbn Ezra interpreted the verse as meant to describe star-worship as well.

11. Geoffrey Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought: Including a Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of the Diqduq of ʾbū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ on the Hagiographa* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 17

12. Becker, *The Risāla*, 116–19.

13. David Téné, "Comparison of Languages and Language Knowledge (in the

lology in the Middle Ages from Saadiah Gaon to Ibn Barun (Tenth–Twelfth Centuries), Aaron Maman coins the terms "etymological synonym translation," that is, an equivalent translation that uses the same radical, and "non-etymological synonym translation," that is, an equivalent translation that uses a different radical. Maman also discusses comparisons with or without expressions of comparison in the works of different grammarians from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, and he suggests models for the various practices.[14]

In the *gd* entry, Alfāsī compares Hebrew to Aramaic and adds other meanings to the radical. One is the meaning "to cut," which he derives by comparing it to the meaning of the radical in the verse "Cut [*godu*] down the tree and chop off its branches" (Dan 4:14). The second meaning is "plenty of rainfall," which he derives by comparing a Hebrew word from the Bible to its parallel Aramaic translations (Deut 8:7).

Linguistic Discussions

Apart from the exegetical discussions, the entries occasionally include philosophical discussions but also many philological ones. In many cases Alfāsī uses grammar as an exegetical tool, but not in this particular entry. After Alfāsī introduces the last meaning of the radical *gd*, he adds that there is no difference between the words *yagid* and *yaged*, just as there is no difference between *yagel* and *yagil*; in other words, the difference in the vowels does not change the meaning of the word. It seems that Alfāsī does not want the user of his dictionary to think that the word has additional meanings. Another example of the same kind of comment is seen in Alfāsī's discussion of *yesh ha-yishkhem*.[15]

Appendix: A Translation of Alfāsī's Entry *Gad*

So she [*Leah*] *named him Gad* (Gen 30:11 NRSV).

Arabic-Speaking Region in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries)" [Hebrew], in *Hebrew Language Studies: Presented to Professor Ze'ev Ben Hayyim*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 237–38, 249, 268.

14. Aaron Maman, "Comparative Semitic Philology in the Middle Ages from Saadiah Gaon to Ibn Barun (Tenth–Twelfth Centuries) [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1985), 29–69.

15. Skoss, *Kitāb*, 1:80:194.

(1) A name derived from [the word] *gedud* as she said, *Ba' Gad*,[16] which means "here comes a horseman." And the meaning of *Gad gedud yegudenu*[17] (Gen 49:19) is that the tribe of Gad will have many squadrons, that is, the Israelite squadron will put Gad's fighters in front of them when they go [to battle] to meet their enemies. And when they come back from war, they [the Israelite squadron] will put them [Gad's horsemen] instead of them [the Israelite squadron]. They [the tribe of Gad] will always interpose between them and the enemy, fearing that the enemy will attack them. Also fearing the robbers at night, as it is written: "but he shall raid at their heels."[18] And you should know that, only because of the Gad tribe, the Reuben tribe and half of the Manasseh tribe dared to live there [in Transjordan]. And this is what the prophet Moses described in his blessing: "Blessed be the enlargement of Gad" (Deut 33:20), [which means] blessed be he who enlarged Gad [who enabled Gad to live in peace without fear], because he lives like a lion, he tears at arm and scalp. "Lives like a lion" is meant to describe his [Gad's] courage to live in the Transjordan, separated from the rest of his people. "Tears at arm" means [tear] the commanders and the soldiers; "and scalp" means the kings. And as he described them in Chronicles, when they devoted themselves to David, blessed be his memory: "From the Gadites there went over to David at the stronghold in the wilderness mighty and experienced warriors, expert with shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions" (1 Chr 12:9). When David saw them, he feared and shook, and therefore he asked them: "If you have come to me in friendship to help me" (12:18). From this word is [what appears in the verse] "who set a table for Gad" (Isa 65:11): those who set a table for the horsemen, those who are willing to make preparations, in other words, the inviters. And others say that *Gad* is the name of a star, as it is said in the Mishnah: *gada tava*.[19] And in Arabic we say: "Someone's *jad*" to mean a star and a fortune. They [the other interpreters] understood [the verse] "who set a table for Gad" (Isa 65:11) as [the verse]: "to make cakes for the queen of heaven" (Jer 7:18). And they interpreted [the phrase] *ba' gad* (Gen 30:11) as if she [Leah] said: "Here comes the

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16. I prefer to quote the MT here and not the NRSV ("Good fortune!") in order to remain closer to Alfāsī's idea and explanation.

17. As in n. 16. (NRSV: "Gad shall be raided by raiders.")

18. See n. 5.

19. This does not exist in the Mishnah but appears in the Targum Yerushalmi to Gen 30:11. Alfāsī's citations are not always accurate.

fortune," in other words, "Here I am fortunate!" The first [interpretation, a horseman] is more acceptable because of the context: "and fill cups of mixed wine"[20] (Isa 65:11)—that is, the vessels and the drink they prepared for them [the horsemen].

(2) The same [radical] is written in the verse: "They band together against the life of the righteous" (Ps 94:21): they agreed together against the righteous. And the same is: "and formed a single band" (2 Sam 2:25), one knot. In other instances: [as] "a bunch of hyssop" (Exod 12:22), a package of hyssop.

(3) And we have *gad* [with the meaning of], coriander [as in:] "like coriander seed, white" (Exod 16:31), "Now the manna was like coriander seed" (Num 11:7).

(4) And we have [another interpretation of] *gd* as a radical for the meaning of excision, cutting. Also for this meaning is the verse: "you must not lacerate yourselves" (Deut 14:1): do not wound or cut yourselves and do not harm yourselves, as non-Israelites do to themselves [in mourning] for their deceased. Similarly, "as their custom they cut themselves with swords and lances" (1 Kgs 18:28), "and their clothes torn, and their bodies gashed" (Jer 41:5), "on all the hands there are gashes" (Jer 48:37)—all are wounds and scratches. People may ask about the verse: "And no one shall lament for them; there shall be no gashing, no shaving of the head for them" (Jer 16:6), because if it is anyhow forbidden, how could the prophet have said that a time will come when "there shall be no gashing, no shaving of the head for them?" The answer to this is that it is a disgraceful action, for God has forbidden it according to the verse: "You must not lacerate yourselves" (Deut 14:1). But when they did it in disobedience to the Lord and against his command, then the prophet said to them that a time would come, and their beloved young men would die, and then they would not have the ability to carry on with their disobedience. This is as it is said: "Both great and small shall die in the land; they shall not be buried and no one shall lament for them; there shall be no gashing" (Jer 16:6), "No one shall break bread for the mourners … nor shall anyone give them the cup of consolation" (16:7). In all these descriptions, there is an action which is obligatory, an action which is permitted; and another which is forbidden. From this it is said in Aramaic: "Cut down the tree and chop off its branches" (Dan 4:14): cut it down, demolish the tree. Some say that

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20. NRSV: "and fill cups of mixed wine for destiny."

is similar to the phrase *hagidu venagidenu* (Jer 20:10), [which means] cut and we will cut him from the earth.[21] But I think that it is more correct to understand it as connected to the meaning of "talking," because of the context: "Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him" (Jer 20:10).

(5) And we have *gd* as a radical meaning "talking" as in: "told them" (Jer 36:13), "he told us" (1 Sam 10:16), "it was told to your servants" (Josh 9:24); and all that is inflected from this word has the meaning of "talking." And there is no difference between *yaged* and *yagid*. This is similar to *yagel* (Ps 21:2) and *yagil* (Hab 1:15).[22]

(6) And we have *gd* as a radical to mean "plenty of rainfall," as in: "You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges" (Ps 65:10): wet its furrows abundantly, let the rain be poured out on earth. In Aramaic they also name the streams *nagdin demayin* [the Targum Yerushalmi to Isa 44:4]. And [similarly Onkelos] translated "flowing streams" (Deut 8:7) [by the words] *nagda naḥlan demayan*. The same [meaning of the radical is in Dan 7:10]: "A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence": falling down.

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21. The NRSV translates: "Denounce him! Let us denounce him! All my close friends…" (Jer 20:10).

22. The NRSV translates *yagel*: "how greatly he exults!" The NRSV translates *yagil*: "so he rejoices and exults."

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Yefet ben ʿEli on Leviticus 27:30–31
and Deuteronomy 26:12

Yoram Erder

In this essay I present Yefet ben ʿEli's translation and commentary on the theme of the tithe in Lev 27:30–31 and Deut 26:12. I also discuss some of his comments on other related verses such as Deut 14:28–29 and Deut 26:13–15. Yefet's work on these books has come down to us in various manuscripts, from which I chose two early ones. These were kept by the medieval Karaite community of Cairo and, due to the efforts of the famous Crimean Karaite collector Abraham Firkovich, were moved to Russia in the nineteenth century. They are now housed in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg (RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:565. fols. 39a–42b [Leviticus]) and the Russian Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow (IOS C72, fols. 8a–10a [Deuteronomy]). I will first cite the relevant biblical Hebrew verses, then the JPS (1985) English translation (with slight adaptations so as to follow the Hebrew as closely as possible), verse by verse. Then I provide my English translation of Yefet's Arabic rendering of these verses, followed by my translation of his Arabic commentary on the same verses. Finally, I offer a short discussion of Yefet's exegetical contribution to this complex biblical law. Within my translation of Yefet's commentary, references to Hebrew Bible verses are indicated in ordinary brackets; additions, clarifications, and at times Hebrew terms in transcription are enclosed in square brackets.

Leviticus 27:30–31

וכל־מעשר הארץ מזרע הארץ מפרי העץ ליהוה הוא קדש ליהוה
ואם־גאל יגאל איש ממעשרו חמשיתו יסף עליו

All tithes of the land, whether seed from the ground or fruit from
the tree, are the Lord's; they are holy to the Lord. If anyone wishes
to redeem any of his tithes, he must add one-fifth to them. (JPS)

Every tithe of the land of the seed of the land *and* of the fruit of the
tree is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord.[1] And if a man *chooses to*
redeem any of his tithes, he must add what is equal to a fifth.

As to the **Levites**, it [the text/author/editor] did not mention any privilege
they may deserve, except for the **tithe**.[2] For it says about them: "And to
the Levites I hereby give all the tithes in Israel as their share in return for
the services that they perform, the services of the Tent of Meeting" (Num
18:21). He did not mention concerning them anything else, and he did not
mention a **tithe** that might be taken by the **priests** from [the people of]
Israel. It is imperative that every tithe be for the **Levites**, and the Israelites
do not owe them (in other words, the Levites) anything besides it. Within
what is owed to the **Levites** he/it has already mentioned the right of the
sons of Aaron [in other words, the priests] which is a tenth of the **tithe**
(see Num 18:26). For this reason the **tithe** mentioned here [in Leviticus] is
for the **Levites** and not others.

It/he already mentioned in the pericope/chapter/unit/section (Num
18:8) "The Lord spoke further to Aaron: I hereby give you charge of My
gifts, all the sacred donations of the Israelites; I grant them to you and to
your sons as a perquisite" that the ḥerem is for the **priests** [Heb. *kohanim*].
For it is said: "Everything that has been proscribed in Israel shall be yours"
(Num 18:14). The priest also deserves the **first born of the fruit of the
womb** [Heb. *bekhor peter rechem*], for it is said: "The first issue of the
womb of every being [which they bring unto the Lord]" (Num 18:15). All
these things are for the **priest**, but the **tithe** is for the **Levites**, as already

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1. The only change Yefet enters in his Arabic rendering of v. 30 is the "and"
between "seed of the land" and "fruit of the tree." Yefet's rendering of v. 31 is more
explanative. I have indicated the changes in italics.

2. The term *tithe* appears in its biblical Hebrew form מעשר (*maʿaser*) throughout
the translation and commentary. Other unique terms such as "priests" (כהנים) or "Lev-
ites" (בני לוי) also appear in Hebrew form. I have indicated all these terms in bold script
within my translation in order to emphasize the common use of Hebrew words within
the Judeo-Arabic text of Yefet's commentary. Such usage underscores, in my view, the
linguistic mélange within his work and his usage of Arabic as a Jewish language, not
only in terms of its Hebrew script but also its semantics.

mentioned above. And it is said: "And all the tithe of the land" (Lev 27:30), and immediately afterwards he made clear that he means what grows in it [in the land], and not the land itself, for it may have been possible to understand [otherwise] that a tenth of the land belonged to them. [This is why he then] said, "of the seed of the land, of the fruit of the tree." And his saying, "of the seed of the land," includes all the grains and all the seeds and all the plants and vegetables. And anything of the land's produce—they have a tithe in it, that is, after setting aside what is [designated as] the right of the priests in the **first born** [Heb. *reshit*] and the rights of the **poor** [Heb. *ʿaniyim*], in respect of the **left-over** portions [Heb. *peʾah*, *leqet, shikhechah*, *ʿolelot* and *peret*]. These rights [of the priests and poor] take precedence over the **tithe** of the **Levites**.…

He commanded yet another tithe, additional to that of the grain, [that is] wine and oil, which they should bring to the temple. If they come on a pilgrimage to the temple, then they should eat from it. If the pilgrim chooses to stay in Jerusalem for a while, he also can eat from it, as has been explained in the passage: "You shall truly tithe the increase of your seed" (Deut 14:22), and it is said: "You shall eat in the presence of the Lord the tithes of your new grain" (Deut 14:23). He forbade eating it anywhere but in Jerusalem, for it is said: "You may not eat in your settlements of the tithes of your new grain" (Deut 12:17).

The **tithe of the Levite** is tithed from the fruit of the grapes, nuts, sesame seeds, and olives which are without blemish. The **second tithe** [Heb. *maʿaser sheni*, in other words, which they should bring to the temple] is from the wine and oil. Yet he also commanded a **third tithe** [Heb. *maʿaser shelishi*], that is, the **tithe of the poor** [Heb. *maʿaser ʿani*], and he mentioned it in two passages. First: "At the end of three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your increase" (Deut 14:28); and second: "When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield" (Deut 16:12). Yet this latter tithe (for the poor) is from the grains and the seeds alone, and one should not tithe it every year, unlike the other two tithes. It should be tithed once every three years, for it is said: "in the third year, the year of the tithe" (Deut 26:12). Hence, it should be tithed in the third and sixth year of a **six-year** cycle.…[3] Now he said here (Lev 27:30) that the tithe is

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3. In the next few lines, which I summarize here for the sake of brevity, Yefet goes on to explain that the tithe for the poor should be distributed by the owner of the produce to poor members of his household. This tithe is different from the Levites' tithe in two aspects. First, it is only from the grain (and not also from the fruit); and second,

holy [Heb. *qodesh*], and so he said with regard to the **tithe for the poor** [Heb. *ma'aser 'ani*]: "I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house" (Deut 26:13). And there is no doubt that the **second tithe** is **holy** too, similarly, and that all three tithes are **holy tithes** [Heb. *ma'aserot qodesh*]....[4] We have mentioned here all there is to point out in regard to the matter of the three [types] of tithes [namely, those of the Levites, the priests, and the poor].

<div align="center">Deuteronomy 26:12</div>

<div dir="rtl">
כי תכלה לעשר את־כל־מעשר תבואתך בשנה השלישת שנת המעשר
ונתתה ללוי לגר ליתום ולאלמנה ואכלו בשעריך ושבעו:
</div>

When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements. (JPS)

Yefet's translation of this biblical verse is literal, similar to his version of Lev 27:30. The importance of his commentary on it lies, however, in the fact that it includes a systematic excurses on the topic, and survey of the three interpretive methods applied to it, as follows.

Before I commence commenting on this section, let me mention the methods of the scholars concerning it, which are three.

The first method is that of whoever contends that every year one should tithe three **tithes**. The first is the Levite tithe [in accordance with Lev 27:30 and Num 18:21, see above]; the text has taught us that this tithe is eaten by the Levites in all their places of dwelling and that this is their reward, as it is said (Num 18:31). On the second tithe it has been said

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it is distributed in the home and not in the field/outdoors. From the moment the grain is hoarded in the house, the poor ought to receive from it once in a while. Yefet states that, in biblical times, there were agents responsible for this distribution in cases where grain was kept in large stocks within storage facilities, and that it was forbidden (for regular folk, not within the three mentioned tithe categories) to eat from the tithe. His references include Deut 14:28–29 and Deut 24:13–14.

4. Yefet continues to elaborate, in this passage, the various differences between the three types of tithes, such as who is allowed to eat them and where they can be eaten.

(Deut 14:22), and it/he has instructed, that it should be eaten only in Jerusalem, nowhere else, as it is said (Deut 12:17–18). The third tithe is this one [in other words, the one described in Deut 26:12]. [He who upholds this method] and contends that three tithes are mentioned herein, is correct; yet, his claim that the **third tithe** should be tithed every year, similarly to the **first and second tithes**, has no proof [in the text], and no apparent explanation to lean on.

The second method claims that there are two tithes, namely, the **first tithe**, which is the **Levite tithe**, and the **second tithe**, which is to be eaten in Jerusalem. They believe that the tithe mentioned here (Deut 26:12) is [not a separate tithe but] related to the leftovers of the second tithe. Those who uphold this method have evidence in what is written in the Torah, as well as logical arguments. The evidence from the Torah includes where it is written: "you shall bring out [Heb. *totsi'*] the full tithe of your yield of that year" (Deut 14:28), and it is not written "tithe tithings" [Heb. *ʿasor taʿaser*], nor any other phrase like it. They also interpret "the full tithe" (Deut 14:28) as taking out from storage the leftovers of the last two years. They also cite "I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house" (Deut 26:13) as proof, and claim that [the second tithe] is called **holy** [Heb. *qodesh*], since it is eaten in Jerusalem. As to their logical argumentation, they deduce this from the obligation to eat the **second tithe** during a pilgrimage. The sum of pilgrimage days every year is around fifteen days: the seven days of *matzah* [Passover], the day of *Bikkurim* [Firstfruits], and the seven days of the *sukkah* [Sukkoth], that is, altogether fifteen days. They say, at the most one should add to these fifteen days another five days, altogether twenty days. They claim, since the tithe is the tithe from crops, and the crops suffice for twelve months, this is much more than what is eaten in twenty days, and so it is logical that much of these crops still remains [uneaten]. And if there are leftovers, then there is no doubt that we should be told what is to be done with them, and so the Lord instructed to leave out the leftovers of the two years together with those of the third year and to donate them to the poor....[5]

We also have evidence, which we shall mention in its place, that strengthens the **third** method, upheld by most of the scholars, who claim this tithe (Deut 26:12) is the third tithe, yet it should be tithed every three years, once. [And see his commentary on Lev 27:30–31 above].

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5. Here I have skipped some of the text in the manuscript between 9b and 10a.

Discussion

The main dispute between Karaite and Rabbanite Jews, from the Middle Ages until today, concerns the status of Jewish oral law, especially as reflected in the codified and sanctified compositions of the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud. While rabbinic Judaism venerated oral law as a main source for Jewish law, which complements the written Torah (in other words, mainly the Pentateuch, but also the Hebrew Bible in general), the Karaites of the tenth–twelfth centuries completely rejected it, designating it as "a commandment by men learned by rote" (see Isa 29:13; Heb. מצוות אנשים מלמדה). Yefet's discussion on the tithes from agricultural produce[6] reflects well, to my mind, the essential dispute between these two scholarly camps. Their basic disagreement is on the interpretation of the pentateuchal sources that teach about the different tithes. Even within the Karaite camp there was disagreement as to how we must understand these sources, which is not surprising when one considers the elliptical and opaque formulations of the tithe laws preserved in the Pentateuch, leading to further debate and disagreement over every aspect of them. Here I choose to concentrate on the debate concerning the *number* of tithes required according to biblical law, the *years* in which they have to be tithed, their *holiness*, and *what constitutes a tithe*.

The First and Second Tithes

Most of the Karaite thinkers, much like the ancient rabbis, thought the Pentateuch stipulates three types of tithes. A minority among the Karaites contended that there are only two tithes. What both groups accepted was that the first tithe belongs to the Levites, in accordance with Num 18:21–32. There it is mentioned that the Levites are given the tithe in return for their work in God's sanctuary (Heb. *ʾohel moʿed*; v. 21) and that a tenth of the tithe should be given by the Levite to the priest (Heb. *kohen*; vv. 25–28). The ancient rabbis designated this tenth part of the tithe by the Hebrew name *terumat maʿaser* (lit. "a donation from the tithe"). As to the first tithe, Yefet emphasizes in his commentary that the Levite alone is entitled to the full portion of this tithe. We know from rabbinic literature that, in Second Temple times, this tithe was given to the priests and not to the Levites (b.

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6. Tithes from animals (see Lev 27:32–33).

Yevam. 86a–b; b. Sotah 47b–48a). The Karaites appear to have objected to this change. In respect of the second tithe, both groups among the Karaites agreed, on the basis of Deut 12:17–19 and 14:22–27, that the owner of the tithe is entitled to it, but he should eat it in Jerusalem. If he is far from the city he can sell it for money and then buy his food with this money when in Jerusalem, as stipulated in Deut 14:25–26.

The dispute between the ancient rabbis and the Karaites regarding the first tithe and the second one stems from their different understanding of Lev 27:30–31. While the ancient rabbis claimed it refers to the second tithe, the Karaites claimed it refers to the first tithe, which belongs to the Levites.

The Third Tithe

According to the ancient rabbis (and rabbinic tradition at large), the third tithe was intended for the poor and hence was called in Hebrew *maʿaser ʿani* ("the tithe for the poor"), and it was to be tithed in the third and sixth years of the seven-year reaping cycle known as *shemitah*. The sages stipulated that in the year of this third tithe, there is no second tithe (b. Rosh Hash. 12b). All Karaite groups rejected this understanding. From the expression *shanah shanah*, in other words, "year [after] year/every year" in Deut 14:22, the Karaites learned that the second tithe should be tithed every year. They understood the double mention of "year" in the biblical expression to mean always, every year.[7] Yefet presents two methods prevalent among the Karaites who uphold three types of tithes. The first method is that the third tithe be tithed every year. The second method is that it be tithed in the third year of the cycle. According to Qirqisānī, the Karaites who upheld that the third tithe (for the poor) was to be tithed every year claimed that in practice it should be stored in the homes and actually distributed to the poor in the third year. This they deduced from the wording of Deut 14:28–29: "At the end of three years thou shalt *bring out* (Heb. *totsiʾ*) all the tithe.…"[8] Yefet did not accept this as proof, and he claimed the third tithe was required only every third year of the seven-year

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7. See Yefet on Deut 12:22 (MS IOS C41 55b): "as to the second tithe—it, too, is compulsory in every year, as it is said here 'year year'…, which means, every year, always, and this is said regarding the second tithe."

8. See Qirqisānī's commentary on Deut 14:28–29 in MS RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:4531, fol. 48a.

cycle. This year is what Deut 26:12 (see his commentary) calls "the year of tithing": "For the tithes in this year are additional to the two tithes, hence it is called *shenat ha-ma'aser* ["the year of tithing"], due to the addition of this [third] tithe [to the poor]." Yefet claims that this understanding was the more common among the majority of Karaite scholars.[9]

The Karaites who claimed that there are three tithes deduced the third tithe from Deut 14:28–29 and Deut 26:12–15. The ancient rabbis (and rabbinic tradition at large), however, used Deut 14:28–29 and Deut 26:12 as proof texts for the understanding that the tithe for the poor (known as the third tithe) is given once every three years, whereas Deut 26:13–15 they called "the tithe confession" (*viduy ma'aser*), which should be pronounced when the third tithe is completed. This created yet another dispute between the Karaites and rabbinic tradition: while the ancient rabbis considered the third tithe as a nonholy portion (*chol*) (Sifre Num. 122), the Karaites considered it as a holy or sacred portion, calling it *qodesh* (which is the Hebrew word used in Deut 26:13). Yefet also discusses the opinion of the minority among the Karaites who contended that there were only two tithes claimed and that Deut 14:28–29 and Deut 26:12–15 both relate to the second tithe. They interpreted the expression *qodesh* ("sacred portion") in Deut 26:13 as a reference to the second tithe. They also claimed that since Deut 14:28 does not use the (imperative) Hebrew wording *'aser te'aser* ("tithe a tithing"), but rather *totsi'* ("bring forth"), this is not a separate tithe but leftovers from the second tithe which are to be distributed to the poor. Their argument from logic was that since it was only possible to eat the second tithe during the pilgrimage days (which amounted to fifteen days annually), there would be much left over, and so the biblical text had to stipulate what to do with the remainder. The prohibition to eat the second tithe *outside* the days of pilgrimage formed yet another dispute between the Karaites and rabbinic tradition, which does not recognize this prohibition. Yefet dealt with the issue of the abundance of leftovers from the second tithe, in the two-tithe system upheld by some Karaites, by suggesting that the second tithe could have been eaten by its owner if he chose to stay longer in Jerusalem. In his commentary on Deut 26:12, Yefet explains that a longer stay in the city was used for study, in accordance with the ending of Deut 14:23: "You shall consume the tithes of your new grain and wine and oil, and the firstlings of your herds and

9. See Yefet's commentary on Deut 26:12 in MS IOS C72 fol. 10b.

flocks, in the presence of the LORD your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God forever."

This second tithe, he claimed, was also intended for poor pilgrims, orphans, and widows, as well as for Levites who were able to cover travel to the city yet found it hard to sustain themselves during their stay in Jerusalem, and therefore not much was left over after all.[10]

As we have shown above, there existed much dispute between the Karaites and rabbinic tradition over the tithe laws, and even among the Karaites themselves. This reflects the vibrant interpretive discussions going on in the Islamic milieu, and the growing place and significance of "written Torah"—that is, the scriptural sources (in our case from Leviticus and Deuteronomy), and their specific wording, in defining the "right" interpretation of biblical law.

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10. See Yefet on Deut 26:12 (MS IOS 72, fols. 9b–10a).

A Prophet Warning Himself:
Yefet ben ʿEli's Dialogical Reading of Numbers 23–24

Sivan Nir

Introduction: Yefet ben ʿEli's Lessened Prognostic Exegesis, as Compared to Daniel al-Qūmisī

The most prominent exegete of the Karaite late medieval golden age, Yefet ben ʿEli (still active in 1005 CE) translated and interpreted the whole of the Hebrew Bible during the last thirty years of his life (960–990 CE).[1] Yefet's exegesis of the Bible demonstrates both typical Karaite approaches to the text, that is, a contextual linguistic approach and a prognostic symbolic approach mostly centered on the prophetic books and the Song of Songs.[2]

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1. Lawrence Marwick, "The Order of the Books in Yefet's Bible Codex," *JQR* 33 (1943): 448–60. For a comprehensive survey of all of Yefet's published works, see Marzena Zawanowska, "Review of Scholarly Research on Yefet Ben ʿEli and His Works," *Revue des études juives* 173.1–2 (2014): 97–138. Concerning Yefet's exegetical methodology, see Meira Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack, Handbuch der Orientalistik 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 389–410; Michael G. Wechsler, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Book of Esther*, Karaite Texts and Studies 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 13–40; Meira Polliack and Eliezer Schlossberg, *The Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Book of Hosea* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 41–69; Miriam Goldstein, "'Arabic Composition 101' and the Early Development of Judeao–Arabic Bible Exegesis," *JSS* 55 (2010): 451–58.

2. By *prognostic*, I refer to a nonliteral reading of the Bible with strong eschatological tendencies. The exegete identifies an esoteric message referring to his time and place as the intended recipient of the biblical text in question. Such hermeneutics might be typical of sectarian circles in turmoil, even beyond the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Karaites. For prognostic interpretations as relating to Qumran, see Yoram Erder, *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls: On the History of an Alternative*

Yefet's predecessor, Daniel al-Qūmisī, identified two independent layers in prophetic biblical accounts, historical and prognostic.[3] In his interpretation of Hos 12:11, al-Qūmisī claims that God created man to receive punishment or reward and so the prophets' prerogative is to warn the Jews of their upcoming punishment for their bad deeds:

> and several aspects to tell and to show to Israel the vengeance of exile and the vengeance of sinners so that they know that [I = God] did not in vain create man and not in vain did I choose Israel but to demand of them as it is writ[ten], "You only have I known of all the families of the earth [and therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"] (Amos 3:2 NRSV).[4]

Al-Qūmisī understands the words "multiplied visions" (Hos 12:10) as a divine declaration that God endowed certain prophecies with additional meaning, warning different people in different time periods. One such a meaning is a warning for the ancient Israelites, detailing their upcoming punishment should they not repent, whereas the other is a warning to the sinners of the future exile, that is, al-Qūmisī's generation and audience.[5]

Generally speaking, Yefet tones down al-Qūmisī's predictive readings. Throughout Yefet's commentary on Hosea, he stops relying on al-Qūmisī

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to *Rabbinic Judaism* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hillel Ben-Haim, Kibbutz Meuhad Press, 2004), 116–75, 378–93. For a different view, consult Meira Polliack, "Wherein Lies the Pesher? Re-questioning the Connection between the Medieval Karaite and Qumranic Modes of Biblical Interpretation," *JSIJ* 4 (2005): 181–200; Polliack, "Historicizing Prophetic Literature: Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary on Hosea and Its Relationship to al-Qumisi's Pitron," in *Pesher Naḥum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, Presented to Norman (Naḥum) Golb*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Michael G. Wechsler, with the participation of Fred Donner, Joshua Holo, and Dennis Pardee, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 66 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 152–56, 159–63, 175–80.

3. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 18–19. So, Yefet can treat the text as dual-layered, an approach not dissimilar to Jewish medieval exegetes' practice of noting a contextual linguistic interpretation and then a midrashic one, for the same verse.

4. Nehemia Gordon, "Does Scripture Really Only Have One Meaning? A Study of Daniel al-Qumisi's Exegetical Pitron Shneym ʿAsar" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 76.3–4 (2007): 399.

5. Gordon, "Does Scripture," 399.

exactly when the latter starts to read things symbolically.[6] Yefet views the predictive role of prophecy as mainly educational, and he emphasizes that the continued value of prophecy to Israel in exile was in strengthening the belief of future salvation, more so than in prognostic elements.[7] Thus, Yefet's interpretation of Hos 12:11 (above) is not a reference to the multiple prognostic aspects of prophecy but a discussion about the different subgenres of prophecy.[8] Yefet prefers to discuss the immediate historic context of prophecy, seeing that this literature was foremost created for that specific historical audience.[9]

Accordingly, Yefet views some of Balaam's speeches as prophetic (Num 24:15 onwards; 23:24; 24:6–9) and preforms a kind of prognostic reading of the last speech, as well as identifying historical events from Israel's ancient history in others. However, Yefet's interpretation of Num 23:7 shows that he thought that not all of Balaam's parables contained prognostic information. Instead, some parables were literal and meant to answer the audience's concerns.[10]

Hence, the following English translation of a selection of Yefet's notes on Num 23–24 will highlight how Yefet preserves the two-tiered structure of a prognostic reading, while interpreting what he understands as the literal parts of Balaam's speeches.[11] Instead of interpreting the speeches as meant for

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6. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 77–78.

7. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 16. Yefet preferred to preform actualizing readings of books and texts displaying messianic contents or an allegoric bent, such as in his commentaries on Daniel and the Song of Songs. For instance, comparing Yefet and al-Qūmisī on Hos 1–3 shows that while the latter devotes more than half of his comments to prognostic readings, Yefet does so only for several verses. Cf. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 20.

8. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 46–47.

9. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 22–23.

10. Erder, *Mourners of Zion,* 343. Al-Qūmisī does insist that a prognostic sense of a verse must always be derived from the literal sense. There is not one example in all of his writings where a symbolic message is based on a literal interpretation different from the one he supplies for that verse. See Gordon, "Does Scripture," 395.

11. The translation is mostly based on A-MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:86 (53813), fols. 88–106, which is dated to the eleventh century CE, as well as Tzvi Avni's critical edition and translation into Hebrew of Yefet on Num 23–24, which relies on that manuscript. See Tzvi Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses in the Commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli the Karaite" [Hebrew], *Sefunot* 8 [23] (2003): 375–78. Avni also consulted several other manuscripts: MS BL Qr. 2475 Margoliouth 271 (6247), fols. 31–17, which was his first choice for completing lacunas; and other lesser, later manuscripts: MS

their historical audience and Yefet's generation, Yefet chooses to understand them as addressing two historical audiences at once: God spoke through Balaam to all present, but he also addressed Balaam and Balak personally.

The first part of this essay will show how Yefet accomplished his dialogic reading of Num 23–24, and the second part will focus on the hidden divine message to Balaam to convert to Judaism, which went unheeded, and why Yefet chose to understand the text thusly.

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The Additional Recipients of Numbers 23–24:
A Prognostic Literal Reading

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Verses Answering Other Verses

Yefet notes that certain verses spoken by Balaam are an argument against him and Balak, answering their future or past claims in specific verses. The most contextually apparent of these assertions is that God refuted Balak's hopes that Balaam could curse Israel against his wishes:

> In him saying: "How can I curse" (Num 23:8) there is an argument against Balaam who claimed that he could cause bad luck and good luck to whomever he wished; and when he said, "How can I curse whom God has not cursed?" he denied his own saying and in that there is also an answer to Balak saying, "for I know that whomsoever you bless is blessed" (Num 22:6).[12]

Balaam is referenced separately from the verse's speaker, showing that Yefet views God as refuting Balaam's claims and also answering Balak, who echoed these claims. Numbers 23:8 is an answer to Num 22:6 and probably to Num 23:3, in which Balaam still hopes for a better outcome.

A very similar interpretation is:

> … him [Balaam] saying, "How can I curse" (Num 23:8): God forced him to say to Balak by his own admission: "Balak, know that [with regards to]

IOS B365 (53544), fols. 63–33; MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:23 (53809), fols. 18–6; MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:171 (53822), fols. 426–405. Additionally, Avni used B-MS BNP 283 (4301), fols. 171–194, which is dated to Jerusalem 1399 CE, according to which I amend the text in a few instances. Square brackets denote a completion by the translator, while round brackets are purely explanatory additions.

12. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 381, 422.

you saying to me 'whomsoever you curse is cursed' (Num 22:6) that was not of my doing but of God's doing, not as I used to claim[13] and not like [what] you and any who had heard of me[14] assumed."[15]

Yefet paraphrases Num 23:8, noting that God forced Balaam to refute past claims and give credit to God. However, Yefet also notes an instance wherein the divine message prefigures an answer to another of Balak and Balaam's future attempts to curse Israel:

> and God inspired Balaam that he was forced to say "or number the fourth part of Israel" (Num 23:10), in order to cancel Balak's hope that [he (Balaam)] could curse the part he saw from Bamoth-Baal … him saying "Let me die the death of the upright" (Num 23:10) is of the angel's forcing him to speak and he forced him to speak thus due to two matters, one of which is to rouse Balak's wrath by displaying his (God's?) love for Israel, for he (Balaam) does not wish to be like them (Israel) when he wishes them ill; the second (matter) is him notifying (Balak) that they (Israel) are a people whose end is good, so that Balak and Balaam as well should know that nothing that they wish will not befall [Israel]. And him saying "and let my end be like his!", he is referring so to the world to come. This saying also approves the religion of Israel as the right one and no other, and that is why he wishes that his end will be like the end of Israel.[16]

Yefet emphasizes that Num 23:10 is forced upon Balaam by God, thus treating it as a divine rebuke. First, the inability to count the fourth part is understood as an answer to Balak's request to curse only a part of Israel (Num 23:13), which shows that Balak did not heed this warning. The rest of the verse is propaganda for the religion of Israel voiced by God, since Balaam—who wishes Israel ill—would not desire an end like that for Israel. These claims are also meant to annoy Balak by displaying God's love, which is not what Balak expected. Another point is to emphasize that Israel's fate is

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13. Simpler form according to B: claimed responsibility for it, *'id'ayahu*. See Joshua Blau, *A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judeo-Arabic Texts* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 215.

14. Other versions: "him."

15. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 382, 423–24. B: *musūkīn = maskūnīn?*, is likely erroneous, but perhaps influenced by the "naïve" (*miskīn*) who believed Balaam's claims (Blau, *Dictionary*, 303).

16. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 384–85, 425–26.

good,[17] meaning that Balaam and Balak should stop their attempts to curse Israel as these attempts will fail and things will only end well for Israel.

Addresses to Balaam or Balak as Addressing Both

Another way for Yefet to find additional messages meant for Balaam or Balak is by understanding certain direct addresses to one of them as addressing them both simultaneously:

> (From Yefet's concentrated interpretation to the second speech) The beginning of his words was "Rise, Balak, and hear" (Num 23:18), "God is not a human being, that he should lie" (Num 23:19), "See, I received a command to bless" (Num 23:20), and these utterances even though he confronted Balak with them, they are actually addressed to them both, for they thought that by moving to the field of Zophim, the situation of Israel will change with the Master of the universe. The utterance "Rise, Balak, and hear" (Num 23:18), there have been said about it two opinions: One [opinion] is that Balak told Balaam, "What has the Lord said?" (Num 23:17), and that was[18] said of his part in a mocking fashion; and the angel made him (Balaam) speak to tell him "Rise Balak" in a fashion of mocking and rebuke, meaning: "rise to stand [on your feet] so that you hear these things, for they are the words of God and so do not make light of them![19] The second [opinion] is that it has been said that he meant by that: "Rise and take leave of these places and return to the situation you were in, as there is no room for you [to have] designs on this people.[20]

Numbers 23:18–20 contains rebuke addressed not only to Balak but also to Balaam,[21] as they both cooperate in the second attempt to curse Israel

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17. See Abraham Ibn Ezra's comment on the verse, which notes an opinion that Balaam longed truly to end much like Israel in addition to voicing Israel's praise, since he knew he would die by the sword (H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver, trans., *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Numbers* [New York: Menorah, 1999], 196). Ibn Ezra's cited opinion also assumes that Balaam is talking about two different things at once, Israel and himself. This doubled address he notes is then less sophisticated than Yefet's.

18. Up until this point, the translation is based on MS BL Qr. 2475 Margoliouth 271 (6247), as MS A is stained.

19. Num. Rab. *Balak* 20:20.

20. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 392, 430–31.

21. See also Joseph Bekhor Shor on vv. 17–19 in Yehoshafat Nevo, *The Commen-*

without heeding the warnings delivered to them, thus thinking that God would change his mind. Yefet mentions two readings of "Rise, Balak, and hear" (Num 23:18). The first rebuke, for making light of God, is known from the Midrash.[22] The second option might mean that Yefet understands the call to leave as addressed both to Balak and to Balaam, as he notes this passage among those meant for both of them, a category he refers to as "these utterances."

Similarly, Yefet views Num 24:9 not only as a curse on Balaam for his attempt to curse Israel but also, indirectly, as a curse on Balak,[23] who is the instigator of the attempt to curse. This is attested by Balak's anger (Num 24:10) on hearing verse 9:

> Know that this blessing (Num 24:9: "Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you"), God gave inspiration to Balaam to say it, to bless Israel, and he [Balaam] was not made happy by it and did not intend[24] to [do] that willingly and so he was not blessed, even if his saying[s] bless [them].[25] This saying had in it a curse on Balak, as he cursed Israel and so he (Balak) got angry this time.[26]

Negative Epithets

Yet another way in which Yefet understands the speeches as admonishing Balaam and Balak is by systematically interpreting the derogatory terms mentioned in the speeches as hinting at their personal idolatrous practices:

> He [Balaam following God's instructions] said: Indeed, I saw him [Israel] from the top of the rocky peaks and beheld him from the hills (based on Num 23:9) and I see him as a people living alone, not like the nations

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tary of R. Joseph Bekhor Shor on the Torah [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 2000), 285.

22. See for instance, Tanḥ. Balak 13. In this and all other references to Tanḥuma Balak, I am referring to sections according to the manuscript transcribed by the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Academy, as representative of the printed editions, being MS Cambridge University Library, Add. 1212, https://tinyurl.com/SBL6702a.

23. Bekhor Shor, for v. 9, notes that God insinuates that Balak was cursed, similarly to Yefet (Nevo, Commentary of R. Joseph Bekhor Shor, 287).

24. According to B: Judeo-Arabic: qāṣada; probably an instance of phonetic spelling of the Arabic qaṣada. Cf. Blau, Dictionary, 548.

25. Cf. Tanḥ. Balak 12.

26. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 409, 445.

dwell with each other, as Midian lives with Moab; and he does not mingle with the nations, with their foods, with their feasts and with them in wedlock. And all these matters are included in "living alone." And him saying, "not reckoning itself among the nations," intends that the rest of the nations are considered together, since they return to one source as we shall explain in "their vine comes from the vine-stock of Sodom" (Deut 32:32), and that is in the sense that he who worships another beside God and does not follow in his teachings belongs to [the] one part, which is of a lie; and whoever worships God and follows in his teachings, certainly is [of the part of] truth. That is why he said "and not reckoning itself among the nations!" (Num 23:9). And in these sayings there is also an argument against Balaam and Balak for they are not apart from the nations but of their entity, and [they] all [are going] to destruction and doom and have no merit and no existence as he (Isaiah) said "Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket" et cetera (Isa 40:15); and he said "All the nations are as nothing before him" (Isa 40:17).[27]

Yefet paraphrases Num 23:9. By being apart from the nations in custom and religion, by "living alone," Israel is spared the fate of the nations and is "not reckoning itself among" them. Yefet also finds in this argument a personal message for Balaam and Balak, namely that their fate will be horrendous, as they are part of the nations.[28]

Yefet understands Num 23:21 in a similar fashion to his rendering of Num 23:9, meaning not only as praise for Israel when compared with the nations, but also as a hidden rebuke for Balaam and Balak due to their idolatry. They are the men of "misfortune" and "trouble" mentioned:

… him (Balaam) saying "He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob" (Num 23:21) means that the bad ways like apostasy in God and the worship of another apart from him—that is not found in the house of Israel. This saying teaches three things: the one, a claim against the nations

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27. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 383, 424. See Blau, *Dictionary*, 95–96, for C's use of *majmū'ūn* to describe the nations being in agreement instead of returning to one source. This is also evident in Sa'adia's commentary to Genesis.

28. In the world to come probably, see Yefet on 24:2 below. Al-Qūmisī raises a similar point about Mic 6:5. He claims that Balaam was forced to pronounce the fact that all the gentiles are sinful, as he was used by God as a mouthpiece to demonstrate God's and Israel's glory. See Isaac D. B. Markon, *Daniel Al–Qumisi, Pitron Shneym 'Asar (Commentary on the Twelve Prophets)* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mekitzei Nirdamim, 1958), 46–47.

apart from them (from Israel), whose religious ways are misfortune and trouble (based on Num 23:21); and Balaam and Balak are men of misfortune and trouble and the argument is against them both.[29]

Furthermore, Num 23:23 similarly understands the negative epitaph "enchantment," which is not among Israel, as referring to Balaam's wrongful practices of divinations and omens,[30] which are attested elsewhere in the text:

> Afterwards he said, "Surely there is no enchantment among Jacob" (Num 23:23), which teaches that like there are no misfortune and trouble (Num 23:21), so there is no use of enchantment and divination among them. This is also an argument against Balaam who was a diviner as he said "the Israelites also put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination" (Josh 13:22) and would look for omens as he said "so he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens" (Num 24:1) and he (God) gave divination and omens the same rank as that of idolatry, for all of these are abhorrent to the Lord.[31]

The Unheeded Call to Repent

A Call to Convert

In his introduction to Hosea and prophecy at large, Yefet notes that admonishing is one of the major functions of biblical prophecy.[32] It is unsurprising, then, that having established Balaam and Balak as recipients of an additional divine message mostly noting their inequities, Yefet also identifies in the same text a call for Balaam to repent, which Balaam ignores. This strand appears in all of the addresses to Balaam and Balak we have seen above, thus unifying them.

> Num 23:14: So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah. He built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. And

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29. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 393, 432.

30. Rashbam on Num 23:23 also understands the mention of enchantment and divination as hinting at Balaam and Balak but paraphrased as Balaam's willing message. See Martin L. Lockshin, trans., *Rashbam's Commentary on Leviticus and Numbers: An Annotated Translation*, BJS 330 (Providence: Brown University Press, 2001), 274.

31. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 394–95, 434.

32. Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 15, 141, 260.

he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah. And he built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar. [This] teaches that Balaam went with him [Balak] because he longed [to do them (Israel) harm], as Balak longed; and also because he wanted to answer Balak's need and thus show him that he wished to do that if he could succeed.… him [the text/narrator] saying, "He built seven altars" (Num 23:14), teaches that Balaam continued as was his habit, with building the alters and offering the sacrifices, since the angel[33] did not deter him from that when he told him (the angel), "I have arranged the seven altars" (Num 23:4). Additionally, Balaam did not dwell on him saying "Let me die the death of the upright" (Num 23:10), for then he would have abandoned his [evil] way. All these things testify that he was continuing in his evil way while knowing that he is sinning. Woe to whoever respects Balaam's situation, while these verses make clear his sin and his evil and insolence.[34]

Had Balaam listened to God (Num 23:10), he should have ceased trying to curse Israel and wishing for the "death of the upright." Instead, Balaam longed to curse Israel and continued to set up altars, while knowing that he was continuing to sin against God. How precisely does Yefet think Balaam should have repented? By converting to Judaism:

24:2: Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. Then the spirit of God came upon him. Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. Then a divine spirit[35] came upon him [Balaam]. He explained that the tribes of Israel were dwelling in the desert and Balaam saw them. Him (the text/narrator) saying, "Then a divine spirit came upon him," intends that at that time, when he did not go in search of omens and the angel did not speak to him and all he [Balaam] said was divinely inspired, to teach that when he was going in search of omens the angel met him with a drawn sword (based on Num 22:23). And when he turned to the desert to look on their situation, a divine spirit came upon him and God did this to him, in order to change his mind, to leave his worthless religious way and to return to the religion of Israel in the

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33. Yefet systemically changes "God" to "angel" in God's dealings with Balaam up to 24:2. This change is in line with Yefet's tendency to alter biblical anthropomorphisms, at times. See Marzena Zawanowska, "In the Border-Land of Literalism: Interpretative Scripture Alterations in Medieval Karaite Translations of the Bible into Arabic." *IHIW* 1 (2013): 179–80.

34. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 387, 427–28.

35. Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 438 n. 446.

same manner he [God] did with Nebuchadnezzar, for Balaam and Nebu-chadnezzar witnessed[36] the wonders of the Lord and his signs[37] and acknowledged that and admitted [the truth?] of his religion and did not leave their religious way and left the world being odious,[38] and there is no doubt that they shall be punished.[39]

At the start of Num 24, Balaam does not try to divine or to curse Israel, so he was directly inspired by God and not an angel. "God did this to him" as a great favor, meant to cause Balaam to convert. This is probably due to the actual experience of the divine.[40] Balaam's experience should be considered together with Yefet's conception of degrees of prophecy. Balaam's medium of revelation as described seems to be limited to sound and so might be superior to that of Abraham and similar to the high prophetic degree, which Yefet bestows on Samuel. Hence, Balaam should have converted when given such an undeserved honor.[41] Nevertheless Balaam, like Nebuchadnezzar, refuses to convert and thus shall be punished, possibly in accordance with his own warning about the fate of the nations (Yefet on Num 23:9).

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36. Rendered according to B as a plural.

37. David S. Margoliouth, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel by Jephet ibn Ali the Karaite* (London: Oxford University Press, 1889), 20. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar in his letters came to note God's signs and wonders: "Shewing that he believed in them, and did not reject them as the philosophers do."

38. A: "condemned." Here according to B and others, *madmūmīn*, as it has a correlate in Yefet's commentary to Daniel (Blau, *Dictionary*, 220).

39. B and others reflect a more difficult form, *mu'aqābīn* instead of *mu'āqabīn,* perhaps *ma'ikābīn*, "lowered," as a metonym of being spidery, but unlikely. See Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 2119, 2177. For the entire translation, see Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 400, 438.

40. Alternatively, God was trying to educate Balaam that cooperating with him has a beneficial outcome, as demonstrated by the removal of the forceful angel; but Balaam did not learn. See Avni, "Balaam's Poetic Verses," 376–77.

41. For a detailed discussion of Yefet's list of prophetic degrees, see Daniel J. Lasker, "The Prophecy of Abraham in Karaite Thought" [Hebrew], in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought: Joseph Baruch Sermoneta Memorial Volume*, vol. 15 of *From Rome to Jerusalem*, ed. A. Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 104–5. For a similar claim that in the Midrash Balaam was honored with prophecy not for his sake, see Tanḥ. Balak 1. For the possibility that a certain layer in the Tanḥuma Balak might have been influenced by Karaites or influenced them, see Israel Knohl, "The Acceptance of Sacrifices from Gentiles" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 48.3–4 (1979): 343–45.

Comparison with Nebuchadnezzar and Confessing Faith

While Yefet's assumption that Balaam should have converted might seem strange, it is rooted in his theological worldview, as Balaam was forced to acknowledge God's supremacy by confessing God's nature. This confession is the prime characteristic of gentile conversion at the end of days. According to Yefet's interpretation to Joel 3:5, at the end of days there shall remain in the world only Jews who call the name of the Lord. Among those Jews will probably be converted gentiles.[42] This fact is made more apparent in Yefet's comments on the Psalms. In his interpretation of Ps 53, Yefet notes that the remnants of Ishmael will enter the religion of Israel willingly at the end times.[43]

More importantly, in his interpretation of Ps 139, Yefet similarly notes that Muslims that will survive the judgment of the end of days would be those closest to admitting God's unity, especially the *Muʿtazilites*.[44] Hence, Balaam comes close to being as such a Muslim by having voiced God's nature (Num 23:19, for instance), and so should have naturally converted.

The comparison with Nebuchadnezzar strengthens this conclusion, as it hints at the genuine character of Balaam's admission of the divine. In Yefet's comments on Dan 2, Nebuchadnezzar undergoes a kind of conversion, resulting in his recognizing God as the God of gods.[45] Yefet also suggests that Nebuchadnezzar's continued worship of idols in subsequent narratives could be the result of political necessity: "if he proclaimed to the world that he adopted the religion of the Jews, their laws would be incumbent on him, and he would fall."[46]

Moreover, Yefet appreciates the candor of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion, even in spite of the idol worshiping in Dan 3. He, like the Israelites

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42. Erder, *Mourners of Zion*, 412–14. The pseudo-Qūmisīan sermon might also reflect a more missionary approach to gentiles. See Leon Nemoy, "The Pseudo-Qūmisīan Sermon to the Karaites," *PAAJR* 43 (1976): 86. The author of the sermon notes that it is forbidden to say that gentile and Israel are alike in respect to all things. However, it is also forbidden to make distinctions between gentile and Israelite except where God alone has made such.

43. Yoram Erder, "The Attitude of the Karaite, Yefet ben Eli, to Islam in Light of His Interpretation of Psalms 14 and 53" [Hebrew], *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora* 1 (1997): 47 and n. 95 there.

44. Erder, "The Attitude of the Karaite."

45. Margoliouth, *Daniel*, 15.

46. Margoliouth, *Daniel*, 21, for Yefet on Dan 4:5–6.

in the desert, could rationalize away the miracles that he had seen and abdicate a faith genuinely gained.[47] According to Yefet, Nebuchadnezzar admits that God was righteous in dealing with him. Daniel had warned him to no avail, until Nebuchadnezzar was punished for his abandoned faith by being turned into a beast.[48] Similarly, Balaam truthfully admitted God's power and righteousness (Yefet on Num 23:10, 18), but neither converted nor repented of his sorcery.

Yefet's disappointment with Balaam as "evil" merits further explanation, as he does not have ample narratives of repentance, such as Nebuchadnezzar's. However, according to Yefet's commentary on Num 20, a prophet cannot not err in relaying his divine message, although this may happen in other things between himself and God.[49] Hence, while Balaam is forced to voice God's exact message, God still needs to convince him to convert. Furthermore, Yefet held the unique position that God chose as prophets only people that would feel obliged, as his representatives, to be truthful to his intentions.[50] Yefet attributes a special role to the prophet's own psyche and choice. Hence, while Balaam was acting under duress, Yefet probably thought that Balaam had the potential to act willingly, else God would not have chosen to use him. However, this one prophet did not heed the warnings of his own prophecy.

Conclusions: A Literal, Contextual, Prognostic Reading

We have seen how Yefet's treatment of Balaam's poetic verses is unique in that Yefet understands them systematically as addressing both Balak and Balaam, while being spoken by the latter. I have argued that Yefet was inspired to this dual-audience interpretation by being familiar with and adept in prognostic readings, while understanding the verses as literal but divine. As literal parables, they are meant for a historical audience; but as divine, they might have an additional audience. Thus, Yefet reapplied the Qūmisīan model unto two historical audiences.

Having treated the parables as a kind of prophecy, Yefet was shown to have seen in the scattered addresses to Balaam a connecting missionary

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47. Margoliouth, *Daniel*, 19.
48. Margoliouth, *Daniel*, 24.
49. Moshe Zucker. "The Problem of 'Iṣma—Prophetic Immunity to Sin and Error in Islamic and Jewish Literatures" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 35.2 (1965): 164–65.
50. Zucker, "Problem of 'Iṣma," 164–65.

strand, calling him to convert to Judaism. This emphasis on conversion was understood in light of Yefet's emphasis upon Balaam's genuine prophetic experience and genuine confession of faith, as hinted at by his comparison with Nebuchadnezzar.

It is my hope that further study of Yefet's corpus of exegesis of non-prophetic texts will produce similar examples of Yefet's highlighting the dialogic potential of biblical verses as an expansion of his understanding of biblical allusion.[51] For now I will point to Yefet's treatment of dialogue in biblical prose as the closest equivalent.[52]

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51. Polliack, "Historicizing Prophetic Literature," 168–74.

52. Wherein Yefet highlights how certain verses are answers to others. See, for example, his treatment of Exod 3, where he emphasizes the dialogue between Moses and God (Zucker, "Problem of Işma," 157); or Naomi's manipulation of her daughters-in-law in Ruth 1 (Sivan Nir, "The Portrait of Ruth in Medieval Jewish Exegesis" [Hebrew] [Master's thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2013], 43–45).

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On the Former and Latter Prophets

Yefet ben ʿEli on the Book of Joshua: A Selection

(Preface; 1:1; 1:8; 4:9; 6:3–5; 6:15; 9:27; 10:12–14; 23)

James T. Robinson

Yefet's commentary on Joshua is possibly the earliest commentary written on the book during the Middle Ages, and it is a rare specimen in Judeo-Arabic. There is evidence of notes on Joshua by Yefet's son Levi and discussion of verses from Joshua in nonexegetical books, such as Yaʿqūb al-Qirqisānī's theological work *Kitāb al-Anwār* (*Book of Lights*) and David ben Abraham al-Fāsī's lexical work *Kitāb al-Alfāẓ*.[1] The next full Judeo-Arabic commentary I know of is not until the thirteenth century (by Tanḥum ben Joseph ha-Yerushalmi). Despite this lack of systematic treatment of the work, however, Yefet does not have a hard time finding sources of inspiration. The commentary on Joshua—as his other commentaries—is filled with references to earlier positions held by *ʿulama*, Yefet's standard term for the rabbinic sages, and unidentified *mufassirun*, Yefet's standard term for other exegetes, usually Karaite.

Yefet's commentary on Joshua includes a short Hebrew exordium praising the Lord, followed by his Arabic translation of the verses, together with extended commentary. One of the most interesting things about the translation is the strong tendency to Arabize biblical place names, which has a double effect—decoding places from antiquity, on the one hand; and making current the ancient places in relation to the contemporary world the Karaites encountered in tenth-century Palestine. The commentary itself has many of the same features and tendencies found in Yefet's other commentaries: he surveys the opinions of others, as noted; he provides explanations of words in context; and he puts the emphasis on meaning.

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1. See Esther Gamliel-Barak's essay in this volume, 129–38.

In Joshua the meaning comes out mainly through a very sensitive elaboration of the complicated narrative development of the book, filling in when necessary and expanding to complete the story.

The texts singled out below illustrate Yefet's rich treatment of Joshua from multiple perspectives. When commenting on Josh 1:1, we see his attempt to completely Arabize the story: Moses is presented as *Rasul 'Allah* (Arab. "God's messenger," referring in Islamic Arabic to the prophet Muhammad), and Joshua as his *Khalifa* (Arab. for Muhammad's successor) who rules the Israelite *'Ummah* (Arab. "nation"), based on his knowledge of Moses's (Musa's) *sira* (Arab. "way") as passed onto him. When commenting on Josh 1:8, Yefet continues and expands the use of this verse as a motto in Karaite ideology: one should meditate only on written law to the exclusion of all else, especially the oral law. The commentary on Josh 4:9 picks up on an apocalyptic theme, apparently from rabbinic sources, that the twelve stones represent a sign of the time to come, while at Josh 6:3–5 and 6:15 Yefet dismisses a polemical theme, found already in early Christian sources, that the seven circumambulations around Jericho on the seventh day took place on Shabbat. Yefet is at his best when explaining the logic of scriptural narrative, which comes out with special nuance in his treatment of the treaty with the Gibeonites in Josh 9:27. Yefet's explanation of the sun standing still at Gibeon shows his familiarity with contemporary astronomy, despite his overt criticism of studying the sciences. The last example given here is the entire commentary on one chapter in Joshua, chapter 23, giving a sense of how the commentary develops over several verses. In this case, Joshua's deathbed exhortation develops around the common theological *topos* of divine "promise and threat," one of the principle categories in *mu'tazilite* thought.

In the following, each biblical text is given in the JPS (1985) English translation, in italics, modified if necessary. It is followed by my translation into English, based on my recently published edition,[2] of Yefet's Arabic translation of the verse (in bold) and then commentary on the verse or a sequence of verses. Arabic terms used by Yefet in his commentary are given in the translation within square brackets, wherever deemed necessary, and so are clarifying additions. Where Yefet cites Hebrew words or phrases in his commentary, they are reproduced here in translation. When

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2. James T. Robinson, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli the Karaite on the Book of Joshua* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

a direct reference to the Hebrew word/term is needed, it is reproduced in a simple transliteration.

Exordium

In the name of the God of Israel, living and existing eternally and forever and ever, the faithful God, who keeps the covenant and grace with those who love him and keep his commandments, and nothing has fallen from all his good message which he revealed through the hand of Moses his servant. May he and his name be blessed.[3]

Joshua 1:1

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant.

After the death of Musa, Allah's servant, Allah spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Musa's minister, saying,

His saying "after the death of Moses" has several meanings. One is that Allah had not chosen who would succeed Moses in the category of messengerhood [Arab. *risāla*] during his lifetime, for he was the first of the prophets of the *'Ummah*, and no one would succeed him during his lifetime. The second is that Allah would not leave his *'Ummah* without a leader to govern it, so when Moses, peace be with him, passed away, he set up someone else in his place. The third is that, a month or so after his [Moses's] departure, Allah commanded Joshua to cross the Jordan into the land, this because Allah had given judgment with respect to Musa that he not enter the land, thus so long as he remained alive it was not possible for Israel to violate this, yet when he had passed away he commanded them to cross over. When he says "Moses' attendant"—this has two meanings. The first is that Allah Most High established for them a student of the messenger [*al-rasūl*], peace be with him, that knew his way [*sira*] with them and was attached to him, as he says: "He laid his hands upon him" (Num 27:23). The second is that Allah chose him as his disciple and he

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3. Originally written by Yefet in Hebrew.

became his *khalifa*, for so was his station [*manzila*] in Allah's view. Do you not see that after his saying, peace be with him: "Let the Lᴏʀᴅ, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone" (Num 27:16), he added: "Single out Joshua son of Nun" (Num 27:18). Thus did Allah satisfy his promise [*waʿad*] he had given to Musa.

Joshua 1:8

Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips, but recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully all that is written in it. Only then will you prosper in your undertakings and only then will you be successful.

The book of this law [Arab. *shariʿah*] shall not depart from your mouth; but you shall meditate upon it day and night, so that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your ways prosperous, and then you shall have right guidance.

He made it a requirement that one not refrain from taking guidance in reading Sefer Torah, and since it is not possible to read it all in one day, he made it necessary that one read every day, whatever is possible. He says: "observe faithfully all that is written in it"—this points to the fact that the precepts [Arab. *farāʾiḍ*] are in textual form, written down, and if one were to do what is written one has done the will of Allah in a perfect sense; were what is written only part of the Will, one would not be worthy of what he promised him. When he says: "prosper in your undertakings, be successful" [Heb. *taskil, tasliah*], these are two things corresponding with two things, which are like [Heb. *chazaq we-ʾemats*] "be strong and resolute" (Josh 1:7) and "Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips" (Josh 1:8)—as if he had done the commandment [Arab. *wasiyya*] of Musa and accepted all of his commands [Arab. *umūr*], and if he were to do the rest of the precepts [Arab. *farāʾiḍ*], then God will make his ways prosperous. The meaning of *taskil* [translated by Yefet as "and then you shall have right guidance"] is like "and David was successful in all his undertakings" (1 Sam 18:14), and this corresponds with everything he helps him with. From his statement—"Let not this Book of the Torah cease from your lips"—we learn that he (Joshua) had with him the copy of the Torah that Musa had written.

Joshua 4:9

Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the spot where the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant had stood; and they have remained there to this day.

And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the *Urdun*, in the place where the feet of the imams which bear the Ark of the Covenant stood; and they are there unto this day.

With this too, it is impossible Joshua did this based on his own opinion; rather, he did it with Allah's command, which is that they take twelve stones from the Jordan and put in their place twelve stones from the dry land; yet he did not mention why they did this. The religious scholars [Arab. *ʿulama*] said about this that they [the stones] will remain there until they cross the Jordan in the future [Heb. *ʿatid la-vo*]; that Allah will divide the Jordan for them; and that they should take these twelve stones as a sign also for the children, thus for this root were the first twelve stones sign for the past, while these are a sign for the future, thus at the beginning these stones are a sign like those.

Joshua 6:3–5

3. *Let all your troops march around the city and complete one circuit of the city. Do this six days,*

And you shall circle round the city, all men of war, and go round about the city one time; thus shall you do six days

4. *with seven priests carrying seven ram's horns preceding the Ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the horns.*

And seven imams shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns, and on the seventh day you shall circle round the city seven times, and the imams shall blow the trumpets.

5. *And when a long blast is sounded on the horn—as soon as you hear that sound of the horn—all the people shall give a mighty shout.*

Thereupon the city wall will collapse, and the people shall advance, every man straight ahead.

It shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the shofar, all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the walls of the city shall fall down in their place; and the people shall ascend up every one of them straight before him.

He made known that he conquered the city through what they did, which includes three things done by the men of war. The first is, they circled the city from every direction. The second, they carried the ark and circled with it. The third is, the *kohanim* [Heb. "priests"] and others blew the trumpets, as we will explain in what follows. Then he established that for six days the way they circled the city would be the same, one time around and then return to the camp; on the seventh day, in contrast, they should do two additional things. The first is that they circle the city seven times and the second is that they, while on the six days they do not shout, on the seventh day they do shout. Then he made known that when they shout after having circled the city seven times the walls of the city will fall in their place.

We say, in an approximate way, that he did this on the seventh day even though Allah was capable of doing something like it in the blink of an eye—this has several meanings. One is that their obedience [to God] become perfected through circling and blowing the trumpets; and more-over this makes public the report each day, meaning that the people of Jericho would go up on the walls and see how they are circling about and blowing the trumpets day after day without approaching the walls, from which they say that those people are madmen. They likewise grow fearful of us, that they cannot overcome us, and with this their desire to overcome them seems proper and their inclination for war strengthens, as he says: "the citizens of Jericho fought you" (Josh 24:11). It is possible that Allah made the walls fall every day, little by little, from below the earth, in light of his saying: "thereupon the city wall will collapse under itself" (Josh 6:5). When he says (therein): "and the people shall ascend up every one of them straight before him"—he made it necessary that everyone enter the city from whatever place he was at, for the troops were circling the city.

Joshua 6:15

On the seventh day, they rose at daybreak and marched around the city, in the same manner, seven times; that was the only day that they marched around the city seven times.

And it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early with the dawning of the day, and circled the city after the same manner seven times, only on that day they circled the city seven times.

On each of the six days, the day would break upon them, then they would circle the city one time; in contrast, in order to circle it on the seventh day seven times, they needed to rise at the break of dawn. That he says "that was the only day that they marched around the city seven times" after having said "They did this six days" (6:14) has significance, which is that it was possible that "They did this six days" has the meaning of circling only, or the meaning of blowing the trumpets, without necessarily meaning "one time." Thus he made known that on the seventh day they made seven trips according to their custom (see 6:13): following the vanguard and the seven priests, bearers of the ark, and the rear guard, as we explained before in relation to his saying: "in the same manner" (6:15). Anyone who says they circled the city on Shabbat errs, for there is nothing that should lead them to this conclusion. Rather, they circled the city seven days during *yemey ḥol* [weekdays, and took the Shabbat off].

Joshua 9:27

That day Joshua made them [*the Gibeonites*] *hewers of wood and drawers of water—as they still are—for the community and for the altar of the Lord, in the place that He would choose.*

And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Master of the worlds, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

It was the *nesi'im* [Heb. "leaders," "princes"] who required them to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the community. Then Joshua required them to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the community for the altar of the Lord. It was then mentioned at the end of the

chapter that he required of them both things together: for the community and for the altar of the Lord. As for the *ummah* ("nation"; i.e., the Israelites), they put them (i.e., the Gibeonites) into service as hewers of wood and drawers of water in order to make them serve and provide drink; and also wood for the altar, about which it is said: "A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out" (Lev 6:6). The water was also needed to wash the *qerev*, *kera'ayim*, and other sacrifices which were washed and purified of blood; they needed a good supply of water each and every day. When he says: "in the place that He would choose"—he means, to any place which "He would choose to establish His name" (Deut 14:24), meaning Gilgal, Shilo, Bethel, Nob, Gibeon, and Jerusalem.

The people differ regarding their being hewers of wood and drawers of water. One said that this is in place of taxation, and they had no other obligation; so they did this in Nob without having wages for it. One group said, in contrast, that they take their wages in what they do specifically for the community, but do not take wages for what is specific to the house of Allah. They sought to make them despicable because of this, as was already said: "Therefore, be accursed!" (Josh 9:23); and with those like them, he said: "(your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp), from woodchopper to water drawer" (Deut 29:10).

Now that we have reached the end of the interpretation of this story, we return to elucidate what requires elucidation, which is that the Creator, great is his greatness, commanded the killing of seven nations (of Canaan). How then could this oath be canceled? Is there a difference between this and someone who takes an oath to eat bread when it had been made clear that it was pure but then it became clear to him afterwards that it was impure, forbidden [Arab. *ḥarām*], is it incumbent upon him to eat this bread or not? In fact, the law is established in its place, while the oath, in contrast, does not have binding force on him. So why did this not happen also with the affair of the Gibeonites?

The difference between them is that the word of Allah, "you shall not let a soul remain alive" (Deut 20:16), does not apply in every case, for he said after: "lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things" (Deut 20:18). Since he connected to the ruse of the Gibeonites their entry into the religion, then the oath stands. Likewise we say that, were all the seven nations [*shiv'a goyim*] to enter the religion before the sword, it would be obligatory to allow them to live, for the reason for destroying them is so they not teach us their beliefs. The same applies with the prohibition against marrying them (see Deut 7:4). What makes the case of the

Gibeonites fall with Israel is that they did not come to them out of fear (of their religious belief), and for this reason he said to them: "Therefore, be accursed!" (Josh 9:23).

If someone should now ask: if this principle were in fact sound, why did the community make an uproar against the *nesi'im*? We say they did not know how the story had unfolded between the *nesi'im* and them [the Gibeonites], so when this was disclosed by the princes, they were fine holding to it.

<div align="center">Joshua 10:12–14</div>

12. *On that occasion, when the Lord routed the Amorites before the Israelites, Joshua addressed the Lord; he said in the presence of the Israelites: Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the valley of Aijalon!"*

Then spoke Joshua with Allah in the day when Allah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in their presence, "O sun, stand still from your cycle in Gibeon; and you, O moon, stand still in the valley of Ayalon."

13. *And the sun stood still and the moon halted, while a nation wreaked judgment on its foes—as is written in the Book of Jashar. Thus the sun halted in midheaven, and did not press on to set, for a whole day.*

So the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the Book of the Straight? And the sun stood still in half of the heaven, and hasted not to go down in a whole day.

Joshua did not refrain from killing them until the sun had reached the highest point in the heaven. Then he surveyed the camp's size and realized they would not succeed in killing them all on that day, which means that when the night would divide them, they would escape, and their burden would extend even longer.

He said: "Joshua addressed the Lᴏʀᴅ"—and then said after: "Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon." It is impossible that one speak to the Lord saying: "Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon," so what seems correct is that he asked Allah

for the day to stop for him, knowing that Allah would grant him what he asked for in this matter; and in fact Allah did answer him with respect to this, but he said to him: "Speak directly to the Sun and Moon in the presence of the children of Israel (Arab. *Isra'il*) so that, when it does stand still, they will know that I am the one who made it stand still through your speech and for your sake."

By saying: "Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon"—he points to the fact that all the spheres continued to move other than the sphere of the sun and moon, which points to the fact that the sun and moon are together in one zodiacal constellation, and for this reason he mentioned sun and moon. When he says: "Stand still"—he means, stay firm from your movement, which points to the fact that when he said: "O sun, at Gibeon"—Joshua was in Gibeon before he had chased after them, while the sun was at the high point of the heaven, as he said: "Thus the sun halted in midheaven."

He says: "in the Book of Jashar" [Heb. *Sefer ha-Yashar*]—it has been said that he refers to Sefer Torah, namely, the saying: "and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations" (Gen 48:19). This refers to what was heard in the world with regard to what happened to him, for when the sun and moon stood still for him [Joshua], this was reported and people knew that the source of it was Joshua. It has also been said that the book of Joshua is *Sefer ha-Yashar*; and similarly it is said in (David's) dirge: "It is recorded in the Book of Jashar" (2 Sam 1:18), which alludes to the book of Samuel, which was called *Sefer ha-Yashar* on account of its establishing Israel's matters [Arab. *'aḥwāl*] according to their religion and all its other conditions [Arab. *'aḥwāl*]. The book of Judges and the book of Kings, in contrast, are not called *Sefer ha-Yashar* on account of the disorder of their matters and religion. It has also been said that they were in possession of a distinct book called *Sefer ha-Yashar*.

When he says: "and did not press on to set, for the whole day"—he made known that he made the sun stay where it was without moving for three-fourths of the day, which means that it stood still from its movement until one fourth of the day remained; it did not need to move through a full complete day; it was as if it moved the distance of a quarter day then stood still for three-quarters of the day. That is, if you were to combine together the hours of sunlight during that day, they would count thirty hours approximately, while the total hours of that day would be forty-two.

Then he made known that since Allah's creation of the world and as long as the world exists, there is nothing comparable to this day in terms of length or the standing still of a sphere without revolving, as he says:

14. *For the Lord fought for Israel. Neither before nor since has there ever been such a day, when the Lord acted on words spoken by a man.*

There was no day like that before it or after it, that Allah hearkened unto the voice of a prophet, for Allah fights for Israel.

When he says: "when the LORD acted on words spoken by a man"—this corresponds with what he already said, that a man asked Allah that he remove the conventional working of time from its order, as it was said: "If you could break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that day and night should not come at their proper time" (Jer 33:20). Then Allah received his word and changed it from its [natural] order. We will speak about the return of the sun in the time of Hezekiah in its place (see [our commentary on] 2 Kgs 20:8–11).

<div align="center">Joshua 23</div>

1. *Much later, after the Lord had given Israel rest from all the enemies around them, and when Joshua was old and well advanced in years,*

It came to pass many days after Allah had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and entered into days of old age.

2. *Joshua summoned all Israel, their elders and commanders, their magistrates and officials, and said to them: "I have grown old and am advanced in years."*

So Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, "I am old and have entered the days of old age."

3. *"You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all those nations on your account, for it was the Lord your God who fought for you."*

"And you have seen what Allah your God has done unto these nations because of you; for Allah your God, he fights for you."

He says: "Much later, after"—what he means is, after many years when
the death of Joshua approached, he called all of Israel from their places,
including among them the children of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. When
he says to them: "I have grown old and am advanced in years"—his pur-
pose in this is [to indicate] that I, who persisted in your presence, am
passing away from among you. So now consider how you will be after me
with respect to obedience to Allah. If you are obedient to Allah, then he
will obliterate these remaining nations and you will be at ease in your land
and with your good things [Arab. *ni'am*]. Yet if you rebel against him you
will be destroyed and eliminated from this land. This is the purpose of
the chapter. When he says: "You have seen"—what he means is, you have
witnessed what Allah did to your enemies who are greater in number and
stronger than you. You know that Allah fights for you.

> 4. *"See, I have allotted to you, by your tribes, [the territory of] these
> nations that still remain, and that of all the nations that I have
> destroyed, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea in the West."*

> **"Behold, I have divided unto you by lot cities of these nations
> [**'*umam*]** that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from
> the** Urdun**, and the land of all the other nations [***Arab. 'ahzaab***]
> that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward**."

> 5. *"The Lord your God Himself will thrust them out on your account
> and drive them out to make way for you, and you shall possess their
> land as the Lord your God promised you."*

> **"And Allah, your God, he shall expel them from before you, and
> drive them from out of your sight; and you shall possess their
> land, as Allah, your God, has promised you.**

His purpose in this verse is twofold. First, that Allah satisfied his promise
and gave them the land of these nations. The second is moving them to
obliterate what remains of the seven nations of Canaan [Heb. *shiv'a goyim*]
so that they inherit the totality of the country with no one else remaining
in it. When he says: "The Lord your God Himself will thrust them out on
your account"—he means, if you take action in war against them, Allah
will expel them from before you; at the time of war you will rout them.
When he says: "and drive them out to make way for you"—that is, he will

obliterate anyone remaining in the country, from old men to children and others.

6. "*But be most resolute to observe faithfully all that is written in the Book of the Teaching of Moses, without ever deviating from it to the right or to the left,*"

"Be you therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the composition [Arab. *diwaan*] of Moses, that you turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left."

7. "*and without intermingling with these nations that are left among you. Do not utter the names of their gods or swear by them; do not serve them or bow down to them.*"

"That you come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them."

8. "*But hold fast to the Lord your God as you have done to this day.*"

"But cleave unto Allah, your God, as you have done unto this day."

He commanded them to do all that Allah required of him in the book of the Torah of Moses and warned them strongly against entering into the seven nations (of Canaan), as he said: "and without intermingling"—that is, do not follow their beliefs, do not marry with them, and do not reside among them. When he says: "Do not utter the names (of their gods)"—he means, do not describe them with pleasant descriptions. When he says: "But hold fast to the Lord your God"—he means, cleave perpetually to obedience to him; do not remove yourself from that.

9. "*The Lord has driven out great, powerful nations on your account, and not a man has withstood you to this day.*"

"Allah has driven out from before you great nations and strong; but as for you, no one has been able to stand before you unto this day."

10. *"A single man of you would put a thousand to flight, for the Lord your God Himself has been fighting for you, as He promised you."*

"One of you shall chase a thousand, for Allah, your God, he it is that fights for you, as he promised you."

He describes again Allah's ways with them since they had entered the land until this moment in order to exhort them not to allow the seven nations to survive and not to mix with them. He said: "A single man of you would put a thousand to flight"—yet there was no such previous guarantee to the fathers; rather, he guaranteed: "Five of you shall give chase to a hundred" (Lev 26:8). In this there are two meanings. One is that the guarantee was to your generations which remain obedient over the passing of time; the second is, that [guarantee] was said of the [Israelite] *Ummah* (Arab. "nation") as a whole, while this one for an individual.

11. *"For your own sakes, therefore, be most mindful to love the Lord your God."*

"Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that you love Allah, your God."

He says: "be most mindful"—this needs some elaboration, which is: keep from being rebellious and from serving anything other than Allah, as it is said in the Torah: "For your own sake, therefore, be most careful—since you saw no shape" (Deut 4:15).

12. *"For should you turn away and attach yourselves to the remnants of those—to those that are left among you—and intermarry with them, you joining them you joining them and they joining you,"*

"Else if you do in any wise go back and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you,"

13. *"Know for certain that the Lord your God will not continue to drive these nations out before you; they shall become a snare and a trap for you, a scourge to your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the Lord your God has given you."*

"Know for a certainty that Allah, your God, will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall become snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which Allah, your God, hath given you."

He said: know that when you return from what Allah commanded you and mix with these nations and marry amongst them, Allah will withdraw from having providence over you and make the remainder of these nations "become snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides." As for snares and traps [Heb. *paḥ u-moqesh*]—these are used with reference to their joining in their religion and accepting their beliefs. As for: "and scourges in your sides" [Heb. *leshotet be-zideykhem*]—this refers to taking them and dividing them into two groups. As for them that reside in the villages separately, he likened them to "scourges" which beat them from behind, while those that reside with them in their villages are like the teeth of a spear that enters the eye. Moses, peace be with him, said something similar: "those whom you allow to remain shall be stings in your eyes and thorns in your sides" (Num 33:55).

14. *"I am now going the way of all the earth. Acknowledge with all your heart and soul that not one of the good things that the Lord your God promised you has failed to happen; they have all come true for you, not a single one has failed."*

"And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; for you know in all your heart and soul that not one promise has failed of all the good promises which Allah, your God, spoke concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one word has failed thereof."

When he says: "I am now going the way of all the earth"—he means, I am passing away from you, and you are in the best state with respect to your life in this world and your religion; Allah has already completed for you his good promises in my days. When he says: "Acknowledge with all your heart"—he means, it is required that you affirm that Allah completed his promises for you and that not one thing of his promises fell away. Allah will take proof [Arab. *hujja*] from this with respect to you, that you stand

firm in obedience to him so that his providence remain continuously upon you and his goodness over you.

> 15. *"But just as every good thing that the Lord your God promised you has been fulfilled for you, so the Lord can bring upon you every evil thing until He has wiped you off this good land that the Lord your God has given you."*

> **"Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good word comes upon you, which Allah <your God> said to you, so shall Allah bring upon you all the difficult threat [Arab. *al-waʿiid*] that he threatened you with, until he has destroyed you from off this good land which Allah your God has given you."**

> 16. *"If you break the covenant that the Lord your God enjoined upon you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you shall quickly perish from the good land that he has given you."*

> **"When you have transgressed the covenant of Allah your God, which he commanded you, and have gone <and served> other gods <and bowed yourselves to them>, then shall the anger of Allah be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land which he has given unto you."**

He said, if you transgress the covenant of Allah, your matters [Arab. *ʾaḥwāl*] will be upturned upon you, for just as he is capable of giving you good, so is he capable of destroying you and obliterating you from this land, exactly as he made as condition upon you. Know that "if you break the covenant that the Lord" (v. 16)—this is prior in action to "But just as every" (v. 15), for that is description of their action (v. 16) and this of their recompense (v. 15).

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A Judeo-Arabic Manuscript by an Unnamed Author:
A Story about King Solomon

Rachel Hasson

Introduction: The Manuscript

The manuscript under discussion, MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 2:1484, is part of the Firkovitch Collection, held at the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg, originally from a Karaite genizah in Cairo. The manuscript comprises a single page, and its author is not named; from the shape of the writing, it appears to date to the fifteenth century CE.[1] The script is a precise late Oriental hand. Arabic *shadda* (doubling sign over a consonant) and *tanwīn* (nunnation) signs appear here and there throughout the manuscript. The title הדה קצה סלימאן אבן דאווד ("This is the story of Solomon son of David") does not reveal which of the many stories about King Solomon appears in the text, but it may be a prologue to the "Story of the Ant" (see below). The initial words, הדה קצה ("this is the story"), are written in an enlarged square script, and the letters are decorated by a surrounding external line and foliation above them. The manuscript includes marginal notes correcting or complementing the text. Thus, the story appears to have undergone careful collation by the copyist (as the same script appears both in text and margins).[2]

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1. My thanks to Ms. Tamar Leiter, from the Paleography Institute at the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, who helped me date the manuscript.

2. Within the translation that follows, parentheses indicate additions or clarifications. Square brackets indicate marginal or interlinear notes in the manuscript. Hebrew Bible verses are found within the Judeo-Arabic text in Hebrew but are hereby translated into English as well.

Translation

/fol. 1a/ This is the story (*qiṣṣa*) of Solomon the son of David, may he rest in peace.

   We have heard about Solomon the son of David, may he rest in peace, that nobody was better than him in the world's wisdom, as the Book (the Bible) indicates]three verses] by its saying: "He was wiser than anyone else," and so on.[3] And it is mentioned of him that he spoke with the plants, animals, and reptiles on the land, and he spoke with the fish of the sea like (the Bible) says: "He would speak of trees," and so on.[4] In accordance with that (Solomon),[5] may he rest in peace, (was occupied with) producing gold from its mines and silver and gems; and the buildings and the trees were well established (by him), like (the Bible) says: "I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself";[6] and says: "I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings";[7] and (Solomon) also reprimanded the ignorant people, the brutal people who forgot to have authorization (for their actions), with a decisive reproach and made for them, concerning

   /fol. 1b/ this matter, a fable, and said: Woe weak person, who speaks about his profit and cautionary measures[8] using what rescues him from God's punishment? Woe poor person, go to the ant, look at her manners and become wise! As (the Bible) says:

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   3. "He was wiser than anyone else, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, children of Mahol; his fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations" (MT 1 Kgs 5:11, NRSV 4:31).

   4. "He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish" (MT 1 Kgs 5:13, NRSV 4:33).

   5. As far as I understand, the author of our text attributes the next verses he quotes (Qoh 2:4, 8) to King Solomon; he also does the same concerning the "Fable of the Ant" (Prov 6:6–8).

   6. Qoh 2:4 NRSV.

   7. "I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, and many concubines" (Qoh 2:8 NRSV).

   8. Arab. *istiʿdād* (Joshua Blau, *A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* [Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006], 425).

"Go to the ant, you lazybones," and so on.[9] She does not have a ruler[10] nor a consultant, and she does not have a someone to warn her nor an informer, (she has) just what God engages in her through the fineness of his wisdom, as (the Bible) says: "Without having any chief," and so on.[11] And look, woe to you, at what the ant does through (God's) fineness of creation and wisdom, (that despite) her lack of swiftness and power, she gathers during the summer her nutriment and accumulates at harvest time her food, as (the Bible) says: "It prepares its food in summer," and so on.[12] And she has many perfections apart from this, like good planning and civility, because (the Bible) says: "consider its ways" and not "its way," and hence that she first prepares a place where she (can) accumulate what she gathers to (be) a mark for her.

Comments

Biblical and midrashic stories—the genre to which our text belongs—are very popular in the Cairo Genizah. These stories were widespread due to the functions they fulfilled within the life of Jewish communities in Islamic lands. Some stories played a role in Jewish communal life outside formal prayers while others, apparently in most Jewish communities in the Islamic lands, had a role identical to the latter. Such a story is, for instance, *Qiṣṣat Ester* ("Story of Esther"), written in rhyming prose and telling the story of the Esther Scroll. *Qiṣṣat Ester* was apparently read on Shabbat *Zechor*, the Saturday before Purim. *Qiṣṣat Yūsuf* ("Story of Joseph") was read during Passover. *Qiṣṣat Ḥannah* ("Story of Hannah"), a lament for Hannah and her seven sons, and *Qiṣṣat Zechariah* ("Story of Zechariah"), a lament for the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, were read on the ninth day of the month Av, the commemorative day for the destruction.

Other stories too were intended to serve didactic purposes within the Jewish community. These were meant to teach stories from the Bible and the Midrash, to demonstrate God's miracles and the superiority of the Jewish faith. Such, for example, are the story of Abraham and Nimrod and

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9. "Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise" (Prov 6:6 NRSV).

10. I.e., to instruct it what to do.

11. "Without having any chief or officer or ruler" (Prov 6:7 NRSV).

12. "It prepares its food in summer, and gathers its sustenance in harvest" (Prov 6:8 NRSV).

the stories about King Solomon deriving from the Midrash, which are the focus of this article. The Cairo Genizah contains a few dozen Judeo-Arabic manuscripts of stories about King Solomon, among them the "Story of King Solomon and Asmodeus," the "Story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," the "Story of King Solomon's Throne," and the "Story of the Ant."[13]

The literature about biblical prophets is roughly equivalent to the genre called in Arabic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* ("Tales of the Prophets") or *al-isrāʾīliyyāt*. This genre comprises ancient tales about the children of Israel (*banū Isrāʾīl*) and folkloric material of Jewish origin, transmitted orally during the first generations of Islam. Already then storytellers who specialized in transmitting traditions about the Qurʾanic prophets appeared. Their tales included Christian and Jewish material and much content from the Midrash. Against this background, medieval popular tales about biblical prophets are usually characterized by intercultural influences. These influences reflect the close relations of the Jews with their surroundings.[14]

It should be noted that the term *qiṣṣa*, which appears in the title of our manuscript, is the popular term used in Judeo-Arabic popular stories that focus on biblical characters. The term was adapted by Jews from Islamic sources to indicate a narrative unit connected to the history and acts of a biblical character. This use of the term *qiṣṣa* is found in Judeo-Arabic exegesis to the Bible already from the ninth century CE.[15]

As for the text in our manuscript, it is filled with many biblical quotations and shows no direct Muslim influences. The biblical quotations are accompanied by partial or complete free translations or, sometimes, by paraphrases. The first page describes the virtues, power, and wisdom of King Solomon, interspersed with verses from 1 Kgs 5 and Qoh 2. On the second page the author begins telling the story that appears in Prov 6:6–8.

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13. Rachel Hasson-Kenat, "New Manuscripts Written in Late Judaeo-Arabic from the Firkovitch Collection—Classification, Description and Sample Texts" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2016), 23–27.

14. Hasson-Kenat, "New Manuscripts," 29; Shlomo Dov Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1974), 194–95; Marc S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006).

15. Meira Polliack, "Conceptualization of the Biblical Narrative and Its Preparation to Written Form from Oral Traditions: From New Judaeo-Arabic Commentaries of Middle Ages" [Hebrew], *Bein ʿEver la-ʿArav: Contacts Between Arabic Literature and Jewish Literature in the Middle Ages and in Modern Times* 6 (2014): 113–14.

This may be part of the beginning of the "Story of the Ant," a section that includes the story's prologue. The "Story of the Ant" is quite popular in the Firkovitch Collection. So far seven manuscripts with this story have been found, all of them incomplete; those that contain the beginning of the text do not have a prologue such as appears in our manuscript. Although it is not at all certain that this manuscript is indeed part of the "Story of the Ant," it should be noted that this story is not Jewish in origin, and it is similar to medieval Arabic fantasy tales. To this we should add that the queen ant's warning to her soldiers to beware of King Solomon's spirits, which appears in the Qur'an (Al-Kahf 18:27), is mentioned in this story as well. It is also possible that this text is not the prologue to a specific story about King Solomon, but rather a collection of biblical verses that the author saw fit to connect to the king.

The author usually begins with the translation and only afterwards brings in the biblical text. A quotation begins with the Judeo-Arabic word וקאל ("and [the Book] says") or the abbreviations בקו׳ or בק׳ (בקולה, "as [the Book] says"). These words apparently relate to the Book, that is, the Bible; I conclude this from the words that appear before the first quotation in the text: כמא שהד אלכתאב ק׳ ("as the Book indicates by its saying").[16] The abbreviations וכו׳ (וכולי, "and so on") or וג׳ (וגומר, "to the end of the verse") appear after incomplete quotations.

The author of this manuscript translates the biblical text freely, according to his understanding of it and without relying on specific exegesis.[17] It may be assumed that the author/copyist (who also wrote down the footnotes) had an expert knowledge of the biblical text. Thus, for example, it was important for him to be precise at the beginning of the manuscript and to note that King Solomon's wisdom is mentioned in three verses (1 Kgs 5:11–13 MT, 4:31–33 NRSV), although just the beginning of the first (1 Kgs 5:11 MT, 4:31 NRSV) and end of the third (1 Kgs 5:13 MT, 4:33 NRSV) of these verses are quoted in the text.

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16. However, one can claim that the abbreviations בקו׳ or בק׳ refer to the author/editor (*mudawwin*) of the Bible. The question of the *mudawwin*'s identity falls beyond the scope of this essay. For further discussion, see Ilana Sasson's essay (243–53).

17. I compared the verses quoted from Proverbs—which are probably the most important ones, if we have before us a prologue to the "Story of the Ant"—to the translations of Yefet ben ʿEli and the Tafsīr of Saʿadia Gaon. The verses in our manuscript are not identical with either.

The biblical quotations do not appear *in toto* and, in fact, only the beginnings of the verses are cited—in contrast to the paraphrase/translation, which can refer to the unquoted, subsequent part of the relevant biblical verse. For example, in the passage

> And it is mentioned of him that he spoke with the plants, animals, and reptiles on the land, and he spoke with the fishes of the sea like (the Bible) says: "He would speak of trees," and so on.

the translation also refers to parts of the verse that are not quoted: "He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish" (1 Kgs 5:13 MT, 4:33 NRSV). Furthermore, in this example we see that the author does not translate the words "from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall."

In the following passage the author combines, respectively, two verses from Qoheleth, 2:4 and 2:8:

> In accordance with that (Solomon), may he rest in peace, (was occupied with) producing gold from its mines and silver and gems; and the buildings and the trees were well established (by him), like (the Bible) says: "I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself," and says: "I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings."

However, the translation that precedes the quotation refers first to verse 8 and only then to verse 4. Furthermore, the author makes no reference to the second part of verse 8: "and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, and many concubines."

The author uses paraphrases in his translation, such as "nobody was better than him in the world's wisdom" as a translation of "he was wiser than anyone else." It should be noted that the author does not quote this verse precisely, and allows himself to add Solomon's name to the biblical quotation: "as it is written: Solomon was wiser than anyone else." The translations are usually not close to the Hebrew original, thus the author uses the phrase "and become wise" as a translation for the word וחכם in the verse "consider her ways and be wise" (Prov 6:6)—rather than the verbs *aʿqala* or *taḥakkama* that could have replaced the Hebrew word exactly. As a translation for the phrase "without having any chief or officer or ruler"

(Prov 6:7), the author brings in a particularly long translation that does not follow the original closely: "She does not have a ruler nor a consultant, and she does not have a someone to warn her nor an informer, (she has) just what God engages in her through the fineness of his wisdom."

After the author finishes recounting the virtues of King Solomon (fol. 1a), he continues, as said, to a discussion and translation of the "Parable of the Ant," which appears in Prov 6:6–8 (fols. 1a–1b). This discussion starts with clarifying the background for why the Bible includes the "Parable of the Ant." The author explains that Solomon rebukes, with criticism and reproach, those who do not obey the law and still expect to escape punishment; in his opinion, the parable is aimed at these brutish ignoramuses. (The author is perhaps referring here, albeit obliquely, to King Solomon's juridical wisdom, as is shown in 1 Kgs 3:16–28, Solomon's judgment between the two women.) When the author finishes translating and quoting Prov 6:8, he repeats his emphasis that the ant has many virtues that the Bible does not note explicitly, since the lazy is told to consider the ant's *ways* (plural) and not its *way* (singular). This usage hints that the ant has many excellent methods of action related to planning beyond those mentioned in verses 6–8: for example, the ant will prepare storage space for food in advance.

It is possible that the author made use, in this text, of the midrash on Prov 6:

> "Lazybones, go to the ant; study its ways and learn" (Prov 6:6)—R. Judah ben Pedaiah said: In the future the wicked will say to God, "Master of both worlds, allow us to do so, and we will offer penitence before You!"
>
> God will reply to them saying, "O you consummate fools! The world you were [living] in resembles the eve of the Sabbath, whereas this [next] world [of Judgment] is like Sabbbath itself. If a person does not prepare [his Sabbath meal] on the eve of the Sabbath, what will he eat on Sabbath day? The world you were [living] in resembles dry land, whereas this world [of Judgment] is like the sea. If a person does not prepare [provisions] on dry land, what will he eat at sea? The world you were [living] in resembles a vestibule, whereas this world [of Judgment] is like a dining chamber. If a person does not arrange himself in the vestibule, how can he enter the dining chamber? The world you were [living] in resembles summer, whereas this world [of Judgment] is like winter. If a person does not plow and plant in summer, what will he eat in winter? Not only this, but should you not have learned [at least] from the ant?" Hence Scripture says, "Lazybones, go to the ant; study its ways and learn"

(Prov 6:6). What is its wisdom? "It lays up its stores in summer, gathers its food at the harvest" (Prov 6:8). ("Without leaders, officers, or rulers" [Prov 6:7]—R. Eleazar asked R. Joshua: "Master, what is the meaning of this verse?"

Rabbi Joshua replied, "My son, the ant has neither king, nor overseer, nor ruler to make her wise, rather her wisdom comes from within her.")

[God continued His rebuke, saying:] "And you wicked ones, should you not have learned from her? Yet you held on to your indolence and your foolishness and failed to repent!" Therefore Solomon said, "How long will you lie there, lazybones; When will you wake from your sleep" (Prov 6:9)?[18]

According to this midrash, the ant of the parable works hard in the present in order to achieve profit and advantage in the future, without having been taught this way of life. According to the midrash, this parable teaches us that wise action is to do something in the present in order to create a future advantage. In other words, one must repent in this world in order to merit the next world. Yet the "lazybones" are fools because they do not act in the present and are not concerned with the future. Our text may be hinting at this when it says that the ant has many wisdoms connected to its ability to plan ahead.

The way biblical verses are inserted into medieval folktales has not yet been studied properly. We have brought an example of a text, titled the "Story of Solomon Son of David," that includes many biblical verses. The text provides complete or incomplete translations of the verses it quotes. The translations are easily understood, combining paraphrase and exegesis. The author allows himself a great deal of freedom: his translations are not always close to the biblical text and may at times also ignore the order of the biblical verses. We have not found a medieval translation parallel to the biblical translation that appears in our text, which leads to the assumption that the anonymous author did not copy his translations and they are original to him. It may be that he was knowledgeable about the midrash and used it in his explanations to the biblical verses.

The text is didactic in character; the method of translation that the author uses indicates that the texts were aimed at broad audiences, particularly at the middle and lower/uneducated strata of medieval Jewish

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18. Midrash Prov. 6:6 in Burton L. Visotzky, trans., *The Midrash on Proverbs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

societies where the manuscript was copied. It appears that the aim of the manuscript's author was to narrate King Solomon's wisdom and activities in a simple manner, while teaching and explicating relevant biblical verses.

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Sa'adia Gaon's Translation of the References to Jerusalem in Isaiah 1–2: A Case Study in Lexical Choices

Zafer Tayseer Mohammad

Introduction: The Meanings of Biblical Jerusalem in Sa'adia's Arabic Translation of Isaiah

The references to the holy city of Jerusalem permeate the Hebrew Bible, especially its prophetic, poetic, and historiographical books. The holy city, with its remarkable and splendid stature, impressively retains conspicuous prominence and presence throughout the numerous utterances about it in the diverse biblical sources.

Scholars point out that Sa'adia Gaon's Tafsīr (i.e., Arabic translation of the Pentateuch) was enormously "successful and it spread to the far corners of the Islamic world," while "displacing earlier Judeo-Arabic translations and joining the Masoretic Text and Onqelos in the trilingual versions of the Pentateuch."[1] Sa'adia was an acclaimed and prolific translator whose translations of the Hebrew Bible included the book of Isaiah.[2] It is likely that as he worked on the numerous references to the holy city of

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1. Richard C. Steiner, *A Biblical Translation in the Making: The Evolution and Impact of Saadia Gaon's Tasfir* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 129.

2. Amir Ashur, Sivan Nir, and Meira Polliack argue: "It seems that Sa'adya produced separate self-contained translations of the Pentateuch, the Five Scrolls, and Isaiah. The fact that these books served in Synagogue worship further suggests that Sa'adya's practice of separating their tafsir from their commentary was functional, and motivated by the specific needs of a wider Jewish audience, who would be hearing or reading the self-contained translations on the Sabbath and Festivals, and who needed a rendition into Arabic that was straightforward and short—and yet accurate and attractive—which did not stray too much from the literal unless absolutely necessary." See Amir Ashur, Sivan Nir, and Meira Polliack, "Three Fragments of Sa'adya Gaon's Arabic Translation of Isaiah Copied by the Court Scribe Joseph ben Samuel (c.

Jerusalem in the book of Isaiah, his approach to their translation became highly charged, especially considering Isaiah's preoccupation with Zion's final destiny.[3]

One may then ask: How does Sa'adia express this concern in his translations of the different references to the holy city, either to its dire experiences in former times or its deliverance and restoration in future times, according to the book of Isaiah? This concern can be accompanied by acknowledging that the portrayals of Jerusalem in Isaiah serve to highlight its exceptional position and its prominence in the faith experience of biblical Israel and the Jewish people. Thus, an engagement with Sa'adia's translations of Isaiah, especially the references to Jerusalem, can serve as a legitimate reason for opening a whole array of reflections on the city's status. The translator lived during the medieval Islamic rule over the city; yet Jerusalem, as portrayed or envisioned in Isaiah, did not fulfil the prophetic hopes of deliverance when under Islamic dominion. So one may ask: How did Sa'adia embark on translating these references to Jerusalem, with all their political and theological significance, in light of the fact that during his time the city was under non-Jewish rule?[4] And how did he, in his translations, grapple with the theological significance of Jerusalem in light of the important place the holy city holds in Islamic thinking? In

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1181–1209),” in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, ed. Miriam Lindgren Hjälm (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 488.

3. On this topic, see modern commentators such as Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), x. On the Judeo-Arabic translation of the Bible, see, for example, Meira Polliack, “Bible Translations: Judeo-Arabic (Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries),” *EJIW* 1:464–69; Polliack, “Arabic Bible Translations in the Cairo Genizah Collections,” in *Jewish Studies in a New Europe: Proceedings of the Fifth Congress of Jewish Studies in Copenhagen 1994*, ed. Ulf Haxen, Hanne Trautner-Kromann, and Karen Lisa Goldschmidt-Salamon (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1998), 595–620; and Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the People of the Book in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

4. On the relationship between Sa'adia and Christianity and Islam and the Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages, see Daniel J. Lasker, “Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam,” in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. Daniel Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 165–77; Shelomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); and Moshe Gil, *Jews in Islamic Countries in the Middle Ages*, trans. David Strassler (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

other words, can his choice of words reveal certain aspects of his theological attitude as well as the religious and ideological thinking of the Jews of his time toward their special holy city?

Sa'adia encountered not only the reality of the Islamic dominion but also the different theological perspectives held by other Jewish groups. In this regard, scholars have shown that Sa'adia titled his translation and commentary on Isaiah, as he did with all his exegetical works, with a thematic name, thus emphasizing its primary subject or purpose in his thinking: *The Book of Perfecting Obedience to God*.[5] Further, these scholars highlight that this epitaph concurs with Sa'adia's view of prophecy as mainly educational in its function and mission, whereas "its predicative dimension is limited to the historical horizon of the prophets themselves."[6] Moreover, they point out that his approach appears to "have been fueled by his anti-Karaite polemic, since the Karaite movement emphasized the messianic aspects of biblical prophecy as the fulfillment of prophetic visions concerning the people's return to Jerusalem at the end of times."[7] An additional formative influence on Sa'adia's translations of the Hebrew Bible, as pointed out by various scholars, is his response to the spiritual, literary, and scientific awakening of Islam, and his desire to reinforce traditional (that is, rabbinic) Judaism. The city of Jerusalem occupied a prominent and central position in Jewish thinking. One may then question how and in what way, in his Judeo-Arabic translations, did Sa'adia express and convey the prominent position of Jerusalem and its obvious significance, as he perceived it, in a nonbiblical language, Arabic.

To further illustrate this point: Sa'adia's theological perspective on Jerusalem evidently appears as he translated, for example, Isa 14:32a, "For the Lord will establish [MT: *yissad*] Zion" (NRSV: "The Lord has founded Zion"). In his commentary, he mentioned that he did not translate the Hebrew *yissad* as "erect" because Zion has already been erected.[8] In this text, he evidently expressed his theological stance regarding the physical existence of Jerusalem, while engaging in his Judeo-Arabic rendering. A thorough examination of his translations of other Isaian

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5. Ashur, Nir, and Polliack, "Three Fragments," 498.
6. Ashur, Nir, and Polliack, "Three Fragments," 499.
7. Ashur, Nir, and Polliack, "Three Fragments," 499.
8. See Sadok Masliyah, "Saadia Gaon's Arabic Versions of the Book of Isaiah," *Hebrew Studies* 20–21 (1979–1980): 82.

references to Jerusalem may provide new theological perspectives and insights concerning its significance in Jewish thinking during the Middle Ages, and the reception history of Isaiah among Jews during the Abbasid Caliphate.

It is worth noting here that, until recently, Isaian scholarship has not critically dealt with the book's Arabic versions and their variations, especially the Jewish translations and the semantic choices in them. Therefore, such critical examination can be a valuable addition and indeed an indispensable contribution to the understanding of Isaiah, while at the same time dealing with an important translation milieu that shows how medieval Jews, living in an Islamic context, read Isaiah and other biblical books in Judeo-Arabic.

Choices of Arabic words traverse new meanings and open new gates to reflect on the texts within new contexts, and with new lenses. The purpose of this essay is to examine the references to Jerusalem, with a particular focus on analyzing the Arabic words that convey Jerusalem's deliverance and its stature in Sa'adia's translations of Isa 1–3. I will particularly investigate his lexical choices, which are unique to his translation of the Jerusalem references, in order to highlight their purport and interpretation of Jerusalem, with special emphasis on the city's deliverance and theological significance in Isa 1:26 and chapters 2 and 3. It is my hope that this essay will encourage further study of other references to Jerusalem in Sa'adia's Isaiah and other Bible translations, in order to understand its significance and stature in Jewish religious thought, as manifested in those Arabic translations.

Isaiah 1:26

Sa'adia's translation:[9] *Wa-ʾaruddu qaḍatak ka-al-ʾula wa-ḥukamak kal-ʾibtidaʾ baʿd dhalika tudʿin balad al-ʿadl al-qarya al-ʾamina*

English translation of Sa'adia's text: And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your wise people as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the country of justice, the faithful/genuine village.

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9. See the critical edition by Yehuda Ratzaby, *Saadya's Translation and Commentary on Isaiah: Collected, Edited with Translation and Notes* (Kiriat Ono: Makhon Moshe, 1993), 5.

> NRSV: And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.[10]

In this verse, Jerusalem in the time of its future restoration is promised by Yahweh to have a new system of governance based on justice and righteousness. This is clearly manifested by the restoration of judges and counselors in Zion as at the beginning. In the MT Jerusalem is called the "city of justice" (Heb. *'ir ha-tzedeq*) and the "faithful city" (Heb. *qiryah ne'emanah*). These names, bestowed upon the restored Jerusalem, can be theologically and thematically connected to its unique status as Yahweh's dwelling place on earth; as such, the holy city bears the characteristics of its master or ruler, Yahweh. In short, Yahweh in this verse proclaims the restoration of Jerusalem to its former original and authentic times of glory.

Sa'adia's Judeo-Arabic translation of this verse begins with the verb *'aruddu*, derived from the root *rdd* (here in the verb form IV, first-person, future) which has diverse meanings. It can simply mean "restore" or "return"; yet it also has legal and moral connotations, which are primarily connected to "restoring" respect after a verdict, "restoring" dignity or civil rights; and the abolition of punishment. In the Qur'an, the root *rdd* is sometimes used to refer to nonbelievers in God who seek to turn true believers from the true path of faith. This meaning is quite evident in Q Al-Baqarah 2:109: "Many of the People of the Book (i.e., Jews and Christians), after the truth has become manifest to them would desire out of sheer envy generated by their minds that, after you have believed, they could *turn you* [*yaruddunakum*] into disbelievers."[11]

In addition, the Arabic noun *ridda* ("apostasy"), which is derived from the same root *rdd*, can mean "the abandonment of one's religious beliefs or principles." In Islamic history, the Ridda Wars (Arab. *ḥurub al-ridda*), are the "Wars of Apostasy," relating to a series of military campaigns launched by the Caliph Abu Bakr against the rebel Arabian tribes during 632–633 CE, immediately after the death of Prophet Mohammad. These movements have been described politically and theologically as separatist movements from the Medina central authority, founded by Prophet Mohammad and the Abu Bakr's leadership. Moreover, the root *rdd* also conveys the theme

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10. All English Bible translations in this essay are based on the NRSV.

11. See Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, *The Quran, Arabic Text with a New Translation*, rev. ed. (London: Curzon, 1981), 19 (with slight changes).

of transformation and change: to "change or transform from one condi-tion/state to another."[12]

Having examined the different connotations of the verb 'aruddu in Arabic and other related forms, one may argue that Sa'adia's use of this form in translating the Hebrew we-ashiva (Isa 1:26) eloquently high-lights a theological aspect of God's promised restoration of Jerusalem at the very outset of Isaiah. The translation focuses the Arabic-speaking reader on God's response to Jerusalem's bleak former times and his means of intervention, especially his redemptive role in the history of the holy city (Isa 3:1), after judging it so harshly. In the Arabic version, Yahweh resolutely acts not only to *return* the city to its former status but to *transform* and *restore* it to its original glory and to deliver the people of Israel by transforming former times into new, hopeful, promising ones. Thus the Arabic verb chosen by Sa'adia captures a strong theme underlying the book of Isaiah, which is related to restoring respect, fame, glory, and dig-nity for Jerusalem and her people, as well as to the abolition of a divine punishment. It highlights the theme, in the prophet's thought, of the turn-ing around and coming full circle for the divine verdict that had initially caused the city's destruction and the exile of its people (Isa 3:1; 54:6–7).

Another point concerning the verb 'aruddu is that it accurately reflects the verbal Hebrew form we-ashiva (first-person singular, yiqtol), with Yahweh as speaker. Retaining the first-person singular in Arabic appears to assert Yahweh's forceful involvement in history as the restorer of Jerusa-lem's glory and its miraculous future transformation. The verb emphasizes Yahweh as judge, and Jerusalem as the judged city (also elsewhere in Isa 3:26; 40:1–2). It also shows Yahweh's profound capability to accomplish the transformation of Jerusalem's former times and install a new system of governance based on justice and righteousness. Though Sa'adia could have chosen not to retain the first-person pronoun in Arabic, he does so, I believe, in order to emphasize the divine commitment to the city and her people. Thus he connects Isa 1:26 to the wider theme of the active divine restoration of Zion that underlies the book. For instance, in Isa 40:2 ("Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins"), Yahweh the judge tangibly and influentially intervenes in

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12. Ibraheem Mustafa et al., *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Islamic Library, 1972), 338.

the unfolding history of his people and city. Yahweh changes his former verdict, so that the judged/punished city of Jerusalem is forgiven, and then graciously given a new life full of hope, peace, optimism, and glory.

In summary, the choice of the Arabic verb *'aruddu* for translating *we-ashiva* in Isa 1:26 eloquently captures the Isaian theme of Zion's/Jerusalem's restoration, its transformation, and its return to the original status of glory and fame as Yahweh's unique dwelling place on earth, including his direct involvement in the whole process of its deliverance. This is all happening in the aftermath of its past demise and destruction and the exile of its people.

Interestingly, the Karaite translator, Yefet ben 'Eli, also uses the Arabic verb *'aruddu* for translating *we-ashiva* in Isa 26:1,[13] while other medieval and modern Christian Arabic versions use the Arabic root *'yn* (verb form II) instead of the root *rdd* for translating *we-ashiva*. The form *'aruddu* stresses the accomplishment of an action or mission. Sa'adia's choice clearly focuses, therefore, on the priority God will give to restoring Jerusalem to its original state.

Moreover, in Arabic, verbs are also connected to certain contexts or specific (extra-linguistic) environments. The verb *'aruddu* can be related to a "desert" context (*ṣaḥraī*), whereas the verb *'ayyan*—with its soft pronunciation—can be related to an "urban" context. One can presume then that Sa'adia was influenced by a desert context, not an urban one, here and used the Arabic *'aruddu* to emphasize the accomplishment of a mission and the tangible transformation which would be happening in Jerusalem, also affecting its exiled people. Thus he was affording this mission a note of noble accomplishment and making tangible the deliverance of Jerusalem by Yahweh within a real historical context. The Christian versions reflect a verb which denotes the mere issuing of a decree or order for the appointment of judges or leaders in Jerusalem.

Another Arabic term Sa'adia also uses in translating Hebrew *ke-barishona* in Isa 26:1 is *kal-'ibtida'*, which means "as at the first." The noun is derived from the Arabic root *bd'* ("begin/start," verb form VIII) especially in the sense of doing things before others, advancing a mission or task as a priority, or initiating something.[14] It also means to found and create.[15] In the Qur'an, the verb *bada'a* (verb form I) is used in connec-

13. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 27a (F35623 at the IMHM).
14. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 42.
15. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 42.

tion to creation by God.[16] (Q Al-Rum 30:27: "He it is Who originates/
begins (*yabda'u*) creation and then repeats it, and it is most easy for
Him.")[17]

In addition, the nominal *'ibtida'* is used to refer to the appearance of
a new tooth after fallout, especially for children.[18] It also means to "resort
to the first road," which one has come from.[19] Further, the definite form
al-'ibtida' is also used as a technical term to commonly refer to one of the
famous rules in the recitation of the Qur'an, meaning the reinitiation of
reading after a pause, stopping, or cutting off.

Reflecting on the diverse meanings of the nominal *'ibtida'* and the
verb *'ibtida'a*, one may conclude that Sa'adia's choice of this term also has
a theological undertone: Yahweh, who deserted Jerusalem, causing the
collapse of its system and life (Isa 3:1), will initiate a change. The city's
bleak and distressful condition will be marvelously altered when Yahweh
will renew his role in history as the redeemer of Jerusalem and its people;
and he will be giving high priority to accomplishing this mission. Thus,
the term highlights Yahweh's active role in the restoration and rebuilding
that would follow Jerusalem's catastrophe, by which his temporary absence
(pause or absence) from the holy city will cease. Yahweh will embark on a
new marvelous mission to restore the city as at the beginning: to its former
glory, fame, and prominence.

Further in Isa 1:26, Sa'adia translates the phrase *'ir ha-tzedeq qiryah
ne'emanah* (Heb. "city of justice, the faithful city") as Arabic *balad al-'adl
al-qarya al-'amina* ("country of justice, the faithful village"). The trans-
lation of *'ir* [*ha-tzedeq*] as *balad* stands out, since in Arabic this means
"country," not "city" (only *baldah* means "town"). Moreover, the medieval
and modern Christian Arabic versions use the expression *madinat al-'adl*
("city of justice"), as does the Karaite translator, Yefet ben 'Eli.[20] One may
curiously ask: Why does Sa'adia use *balad* ("country") instead of the obvi-
ous *madina* ("city")? A study of the references to *balad* in the Qur'an may
provide a plausible answer.

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16. Muhammad Ibn Mukarram Ibn 'Alī ibn Ahmad Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*,
20 vols. (Beirut: Dar Ehya Al-Tourah Al Arabi, 1986), 1:334.

17. Khan, *The Quran*, 398 (with slight changes).

18. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 42.

19. Majd Al-Din Muhammad Ibn Yaqub Al-Fayruzabadi, *Al-Qamoos Al-Muheet*
(Beirut: Dar Al Fikr, 1995), 33.

20. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 27a (F35623 at the IMHM)

Noticeably, the Qur'an refers to Mecca as *balad*; and Muslim theologians say it was the first name given to it by the prophet Abraham (Q Ibraheem 14:35: "When Abraham said: My Lord, make this country [*hadha al-balad*, Mecca] inviolate, and keep me and my children away from the worship of idols").[21] Further, Al-Balad is the ninetieth chapter of the Qur'an, with twenty verses all lashing out a severe attack against the people of Mecca, who opposed the prophet Mohammad and strongly rejected his claims to prophecy. Most Muslim exegetes agree that *balad* is an idiosyncratic reference to the holy city of Mecca.

In Arabic *balad* also refers to a large portion of land.[22] Thus, Sa'adia's choice of this lexeme as a signifier for Jerusalem may be a deliberate polemical indication that Jerusalem—not Mecca—is the real and true *balad* ("country") and the center of earth, because Yahweh resides in Jerusalem, which is his favorite and chosen dwelling on earth (Isa 8:18; 28:16). In addition, even if Sa'adia's usage of the term *balad* is not an allusion to the association with Mecca (as an anti-Muslim polemic), it seems that in Sa'adia's theological thinking Jerusalem is not a mere city (*madina*), but an entire country (*balad*) or kingdom. By choosing this word, he highlights Jerusalem's special status for the Jews as a holy location (which can be extended to the land of Zion/Israel in general; *ziyyon* being mentioned immediately after, in v. 27). Sa'adia's choice of *balad* here is meaningful in several ways and certainly expresses the strong attachment to Jerusalem as the center of faith in Yahweh and of the historical experience of the Israelites, as well as the Jews, through the generations.

In translating the second part of the *'ir ha-tzedeq* // *qiryah ne'emanah* parallelism, Sa'adia uses the Arabic expression *al-qarya al-'amina*, "the faithful/genuine/authentic village." The Arabic adjective *'amin* usually means "known to be true or genuine, trustworthy" and "reliable," and, in some contexts, "safe." When used to describe a person, it means "fair and just in character or behavior," "not cheating or stealing," "free of deceit and untruthfulness," and "sincere." Considering all these denotations and connotations, the description of the city of Jerusalem as *al-'amina* perfectly fits its unique status as Yahweh's dwelling place on earth, for theologically it is meant to mirror his values.

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21. Zaffrulla Khan, *The Quran*, 241 (with slight changes).
22. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 68.

Saʿadia also uses the word *al-qarya* (Arab. "village"). The noun *al-qarya* appears fifty-six times in the Qurʾan, and in many cases it is an obvious reference to Mecca (Q An-Nahl 16:112; Muhammad 47:3; An-Nisaʾ 4:75). Similar to the use of the term *balad*, Saʿadia seems to stress here, in a subversive polemical reference, the theological superiority of Jerusalem over Mecca. He does so by installing in the reader's mind the notion that this term is used to refer to the city of Jerusalem as Yahweh's faithful or genuine city on earth.

Several other observations about Isa 1:26 seem appropriate. The verse begins with the prefix *we*, generally known in Biblical Hebrew as the *waw* consecutive. Its Arabic cognate is termed *waw al-ʿatf* ("conjunction *wa*"). Indeed, one of the functions of the *waw* consecutive in Biblical Hebrew is to link together two or more elements in the text. Its function in Isa 1:26 is probably to create a link with the preceding verse, Isa 1:25: "I will turn my hand against you; I will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy." This link shows that Jerusalem's purging will be followed by the restoration of its system of governance and that she will be given new (respectable) names.[23] Theologically, Yahweh works according to a determined plan and his actions have a meaningful purpose in human history; accordingly, his purging and cleansing of the city and the exile of its people (Isa 1:21–23; 3:1) will eventually culminate in the reemergence of her past glory (Isa 1:21), her restoration, and deliverance.

Saʿadia translates the Hebrew temporal conjunction *ʾaharey khen* (Isa 1:26) with Arabic *baʿda dhalika* ("after that"). This expression serves to connect the clauses in Isa 1:26. This connection manifests the timeframe of Yahweh's plan concerning Jerusalem's deliverance in Isa 1:25–26: the purging of the city will be followed by restoring the judges and counselors. After this, Jerusalem's names will also be restored, and she will be renamed "city of justice/faithfulness." Thus, the reflection of the Hebrew conjunctions (*waw* and *ʾaharey khen*) in the Arabic translation evidently expresses

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23. The Hebrew term *qiryah neʾemanah* is also found in Isa 1:21, though in reference to the city having become an "(unfaithful) whore" (Heb. *zonah*), hence the emphasis in v. 26 is on her reclaiming of the title *neʾemanah* ("faithful"). Note that while Saʿadia's translation of *qiryah neʾemanah* in v. 21 is consistent with v. 26 (Arab. *kayfa ṣarat tagiya al-qarya al-ʾamina*): "how has the faithful city erred to idol worship," he does not render the Hebrew *zonah* literally here, most likely due to apologetic reasons.

the smooth and systematic stages of Yahweh's plan concerning the future of Jerusalem and its exiled people.

To sum up, in the translation of Isa 1:26, Sa'adia's use of the Arabic verb *'aruddu* (with Yahweh as its subject) in rendering Hebrew *we-ashiva,* and his use of the passive Arabic verb *tud'inu* ("she will be named") in rendering Hebrew *yiqqare' lakh* ("you will be named"), seems to stress a strong theological undertone of the prophetic text, namely, that Yahweh is the sole power behind the restoration of Jerusalem's judges and counselors, and that this is his foremost priority. For any reader who might infer that the nations, or even the people of Israel, are the initiators of this change, the translation makes doubly clear that only God can perpetrate it. He will be the one who will call Jerusalem by its new and astounding names. The semantics of the translated text underlines the systematic interaction and compatibility between Yahweh's past response and future plan concerning Zion, and the positive human response to it. Yahweh's actions to alter Jerusalem's grim condition and desolate past become tangible to the reader: real occurrences in human history, not mere promises or decrees. Yahweh does not act in a vacuum devoid of actual historical contexts; the divine declaration will be fulfilled and realized in an actual historical reality, and it will be acknowledged and appreciated by the peoples of the earth as well as the people of Israel.

Isaiah 2:2

Sa'adia's translation:[24] *Fa-yakun fi 'akhir al-zaman 'an yakun jabal bayt 'allah muhiyan 'ala ru'us al-jibal wa-saniyan*[25] *min al-yafa' wa-yuqbil 'ilayhi jumu' al-'umam.*[26]

English translation of Sa'adia's text: In the last of time, the mountain of the Lord's house will be established on the heads of the mountains, and raised above the hill, and the masses of nations shall head to it.

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24. Ratzaby, *Saadya's Translation and Commentary on Isaiah*, 6.

25. The *an* at the end of *muhiyan* and *saniyan* signifies a *tanwin* ending, which in classical Judeo-Arabic is transliterated by the Hebrew letters *yod* and *aleph*.

26. Isaiah 2:2–4 has an almost verbatim parallel in Mic 4:1–3. Since only a few excerpts of Sa'adia's translation are extant for the Minor Prophets, no comparison is possible for this text.

NRSV: In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall
be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised
above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

The verse highlights the value of Yahweh's house, or his temple in Jeru-
salem, which shall be established as the highest of mountains. The verse
likely asserts the insignificance of other temples when compared with the
great prominence and stark importance of Mount Zion, Yahweh's dwelling.
Thus, Jerusalem is a city that attracts the conspicuous attention of the whole
world, as the masses of peoples stream to it to be in Yahweh's vicinity.

In examining Sa'adia's translation of this verse, there are some points
that are worth highlighting. Sa'adia translates the Hebrew idiom *aharit ha-
yamim* quite literally by the Arabic *'akhir al-zaman* (lit. "last of time"), and
so does the Karaite translator Yefet ben 'Eli;[27] whereas the medieval and
modern Christian Arabic versions use the more comprehensible expres-
sion, *al-'ayam al-'akhirah* ("the last days"). Is there special theological
significance in Sa'adia's usage of *'akhir al-zaman*? As shown in our discus-
sion, he seems to be relying on the idiom's specific Islamic connotations.
In Muslim theology the expression *'akhir al-zaman* ("last time") refers to
eschatology, a branch of Islamic thought concerned with the end of the
world or the termination of life on earth and the occurrence of the "day
of resurrection" (Arab. *yawm al-qiyama*). In Islamic literature, the expres-
sions *al-yawm al-'akhir* ("last day") or *al-'akhira* ("end of time") denote the
day of judgment and the day of resurrection.

In the Qur'an, *al-'akhira* means "afterlife," as evident in Q Al-A'la
87:16–17: "But you prefer the hither life, whereas the Hereafter [*al-'akhira*]
is better and more lasting."[28] It is obvious that Sa'adia uses a term embed-
ded in Islamic theology, but the theological rendition is quite different in
his translation and within the context of the verse. In contrast to the Islamic
expression, which is concerned with the annihilation of all forms of life,
followed by the resurrection of dead and the judgment by Allah, Sa'adia's
'akhir al-zaman ("last time") primarily concentrates on the restoration
of Yahweh's house in Jerusalem, sitting on the highest of the mountains,
with the massive voluntarily streaming of many peoples to learn of Yah-
weh's teachings and abide by his instructions (Isa 2:3). Sa'adia employs the

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27. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 30a (F35623 at the IMHM).
28. Khan, *The Quran*, 615.

expression within a new context to highlight the centrality of Jerusalem: Yahweh will not be sitting in judgment in the "last time" in Jerusalem; rather, he will be spreading his teachings and light, thus embracing the people of Israel and entire humanity. This "last time" is not the end but actually a new beginning. Here we witness a new resurrection anchored in Yahweh's redemptive intervention and graceful deeds in human history. Yahweh's actions in Zion are indeed rooted here in a theology of life, happening within a reconciliatory atmosphere, which celebrates Jerusalem's religious prominence, glamorous status, and theological significance.

Therefore, Sa'adia seems to transform the purport of the expression 'akhir al-zaman from its Islamic theological milieu—a dreadful time replete with fear, punishment, and anxiety—to a new time of joy, new life, acceptance, and celebration: the future encounter with Yahweh in Jerusalem is located within a new redemptive, hopeful, and inclusive context.

Moreover, in this verse Sa'adia uses two Classical Arabic words to capture the lofty position of the temple in Jerusalem. The participle (Arab. root *hy'*, verb form IV) used to translate the Hebrew *nakhon* means "good looking/shapely." In our context it can also mean "regaining good shape" in the aftermath of reparation, or suffering damage.[29] The participle (Arab. root *sny*, verb form I) used to translate the Hebrew *nissa'* means "high, sublime" and "exalted." The Arabic root is also used to describe "increasing light" or "flames of fire."[30] It may refer to gaining reputation, fame, glory, and prominence.[31] The noun *sana'* denotes flashes of light produced by thunder.[32]

So we see how both Arabic words chosen by Sa'adia show concreteness and focus the reader on a visualization of the Temple Mount and on the actual accomplishment of the restoration of Yahweh's house in Zion. The two words also appear to stress that the existence of the Jerusalem temple is tangible, visible, magnificent, and lofty. Interestingly, the medieval and modern Christian Arabic versions use the word *ẓahiran* ("visible") to convey a similar idea; and Yefet ben 'Eli uses two words—*murattab* ("arranged/set up"; participle, verb form II) for Hebrew *nakhon*, and *wa-yatasana* ("will be sublime," similar to Sa'adia's choice) for the Hebrew *nissa'*.[33] Sa'adia, how-

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29. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab*, 15:170.
30. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 456.
31. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 456.
32. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 1116.
33. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. I:568 30a (F35623 at the IMHM).

ever, employs two more distinctively Classical Arabic participles in order
to thicken this lofty visibility and magnitude of Yahweh's house, which
acquires an actual, physical existence through his word choice.

Sa'adia uses the Arabic lexeme *al-yafa'* (in the singular: "hill overlook-
ing land") to translate the Hebrew *geva'ot* (in the plural). The plural of
al-yafa' is *yufu'*; yet, Sa'adia seems to deliberately refrain from using it.[34]
Sometimes *al-yafa'* is used to refer to all high places, including high moun-
tains.[35] The verbal *yafa'a* means "to become lofty" or "high" and may also
convey a meaning related to beauty. The medieval and modern Christian
Arabic versions translate *geva'ot* literally by the more regular and plural
Arabic noun *tilal* ("hills"), and the Karaite translator Yefet ben 'Eli uses
another common noun, *al-ruwabi* ("hills"), also in the plural.[36]

Sa'adia's insistence on the unusual noun *al-yafa'*, in the singular, appears
to refer to a specific house, raised from a particular hill, not just raised above
all the hills. In his translation the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem is raised
from a specific hill (*yafa'*) overlooking the land. His usage stresses the Jeru-
salem temple as having a defined location, on a conspicuously visible hill
overlooking the land, which has a beautiful shape. No wonder, then, that
all the peoples have interest in it and can easily find it when they stream to
Zion. This may also hint that Yahweh, in his Jerusalem dwelling, would be
very accessible and approachable because no hindrances would impede the
direct encounter between him and humans at his holy and beautiful abode,
the temple, which can be visible above the heads of other mountains and is
situated remarkably on a specific hill. In this translation, this alluring place
in Zion is quite known and has a definitive address, since no earthly power
will be able to conceal its physical presence.

Isaiah 2:3

Sa'adia's translation:[37] *wa-yanṭaliqu al-shu'ub al-kathirun wa-
yaqulun ta'alu naṣ'ad 'ila jabal 'allah wa-'ila bayt 'ilah ya'qub
yadulluna min sayarihi ma nasir bihi fi ṭuruqihi li'anna al-tawrah*

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34. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 1064.

35. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, 15:425, where the word is said to denote "any-
thing that is elevated."

36. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 30a (F35623 at the IMHM).

37. This translation is cited from Ratzaby, *Saadya's Translation and Commentary
on Isaiah*.

takhruj min ziyyon (Heb.) *wa-kalam 'allah min yerushalayim* [the name of the city follows its Heb. pronunciation]

English translation of Sa'adia's text: Numerous peoples are proceeding, and say: come to ascend to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the Lord of Jacob, in order to guide us in his ways and how to walk in his paths, because the Torah goes out from Zion, and the words of the Lord from Jerusalem.

NRSV: Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2:3e describes many peoples who will stream to Jerusalem at the end of days (continuing v. 2), thus underscoring the prophetic message that Yahweh will indeed restore his holy city to its former glory and fame. These peoples shall go to Zion for a good purpose: to learn Yahweh's teachings and his words that go forth from Jerusalem. This portrayal of the willingness to journey to Jerusalem reflects an optimistic attitude toward people in general: they are willing to come closer to Yahweh in order to learn his ways in Zion. In theological terms, this portrayal reflects the positive spirit of this future age of Zion's transformation, as Yahweh reconciles with all peoples in Jerusalem, when it becomes the center of world attention and worship.

Sa'adia's Arabic version opens with the verb *'inṭalaqa* (Arab. root *ṭlq*, verb form VII), which usually means "move" or "run" rapidly or quickly,[38] and also "move rapidly after being freed from chains." In general, the verb connotes moving in order to gain freedom and, subsequently, become unrestrained. As such, it is a rather loaded translation of the Heb. *we-halkhu* (lit. "they will walk"). The Arabic verb reflects accurately the present continuous/future tense of the Hebrew, yet it clearly intensifies the picture of peoples' rapid and continuous movement from all corners of the earth, with great enthusiasm, to embrace the belief in Yahweh in his dwelling place, Zion. Through the choice of the Arabic root *ṭlq*, these peoples are

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38. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 562.

described as gaining a new freedom as they make their rapid journey to Jerusalem, which will further nourish their theological and spiritual experiences and transform their previous aggressive behavior (2:4). Elsewhere in Isaiah we also find that, for the people of Israel, the journey to Zion is the attainment of a new freedom, terminating the long and painful years of exile and deportation (Isa 26; 40).

When translating the Hebrew *'amim* ("peoples"), Sa'adia uses the Arabic plural *al-shu'ub* (singular *sha'b*): again an interesting choice, since it often refers to a large group of persons, larger than a tribe, sharing one father and speaking one language.[39] The use of this particular word seems to highlight that the many peoples who shall stream to Jerusalem will contain many large groups sharing identity and culture. This may indicate that, within this special unity of peoples streaming to Jerusalem, there is also tremendous diversity. Sa'adia's translation of the Hebrew *we-amru* ("and they will say") is literal (Arab. *wa-yaqulun*). The act of "saying" seems to stress that Jerusalem, in its new times of deliverance, would have regained its universal appeal and global attention, so that people encourage other people to come to worship Yahweh in it. Yahweh promises Jerusalem glory and fame; Zion's glory would be spread through word of mouth by all the peoples of the earth.

In rendering the Hebrew *na'aleh* ("we shall ascend"), Sa'adia uses the Arabic root *ṣ'd* (in the verb form I).[40] In the Qur'an, this verb also means "ascend (to God)" (Q Saba' 35:10: "To Him ascend [*yaṣ'adu*] good words, and righteous conduct exalts them")[41] This verb is often used in the qur'anic context in relation to God, whose dwelling and throne are in heaven. Sa'adia's choice of it seems to be influenced by the qur'anic meaning and setting since, in the case of Jerusalem, ascending to the mountain of Yahweh aims at coming closer to God and encountering his presence at his dwelling place in Zion.

Sa'adia translates the Hebrew phrase *yoreynu mi-derakhav* ("that he may teach [or "show"] us his ways") into Arabic *yadulluna min sayarihi* ("guide us in his ways"). The Arabic root *dll* (verb form I) means "guide," "show the right way."[42] Interestingly, the medieval and modern Christian

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39. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 482.

40. So does also Yefet ben 'Eli; see MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 30b (F35623 at the IMHM).

41. Khan, *The Quran*, 428.

42. Mustafa, *Al-Mo'jamam Al-Wasset*, 294.

versions use the common Arabic root *ʿlm* ("teach," verb form II), and
Yefet ben ʿEli uses the verb *rashada* ("teach/instruct"), which often has a
religious sense of "following the right path."[43] Saʿadia's translation again
intensifies the high expectations and emotions of the peoples streaming to
Jerusalem. They anticipate receiving divine guidance from God in order
to know and follow the right path to Yahweh: the journey made by these
peoples has a moral and thoughtful purpose, to be fulfilled while they seek
and find divine guidance in Zion/Jerusalem.

This understanding is strengthened by the word *sayarihi*, Arabic for
"ways/paths," with a particular semantic focus on learning about histo-
ries, legacy, actions, speeches, proverbs, and so on.[44] Thus, these nations
stream to Jerusalem to learn about Jacob's history and legacy and to
follow his path. Jacob, whose Arabized qurʾanic name Yaʿqub is used by
Saʿadia, is recognized in Islam as a prophet guided by God (Q Al-Anʿam
6:84). One can find certain connections between the prophet Yaʿqub
(Jacob) and the theme of guidance in qurʾanic understanding. The use
of the Arabized form Yaʿqub in Saʿadia's translation (and so he does with
regard to other Hebrew names like Musa [for *Moshe*, Moses], etc.) creates
a connection with the Islamic tradition of the revered Israelite prophets.
Unlike this translation of a proper Hebrew personal name, when it comes
to the proper Hebrew place name, Saʿadia prefers to retain the Hebrew
name of Jerusalem, *Yerushalayim*, in his Judeo-Arabic text. He could have
applied well-known medieval Arabic names of the city, such as *al-Quds*
or *Bayt al-Maqdis*. By retaining *Yerushalayim* he appears to stress the
ancient Hebraic origin of the city's name, hence what might be deemed
the Jewishness of the city, or the Jews' historical connection to it. The fact
that he does not do so with regard to Jacob or Moses suggests to me that
his choice of *Yerushalayim* here might be polemical, so as to completely
distance it from Islamic contexts or claims, of which he is undoubtedly
well aware.[45]

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43. See MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 30b (F35623 at the IMHM).

44. Mustafa, *Al-Moʾjamam Al-Wasset*, 467.

45. Yefet ben ʿEli also uses the Hebrew forms of Jacob, Zion, and Jerusalem, as a
general practice. See Meira Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation:
A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of the Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the
Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 200–208. Note, however, that
Yefet translates *torah* in Isa 2:3 by the Arabic *shariʿah* (a distinctive Islamic term for
law); see MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:568 30b (F35623 at the IMHM).

Further in the verse Saʿadia uses the Arabic verb *kharaja* ("go forth" and "separate"; verb form I), in the present continuous/future, in rendering the Hebrew *tetse'* ("will come forth").[46] Most dictionaries emphasize that the verb *kharaja* is the opposite of the verb *dakhala*, Arabic for "enter."[47] Thus, *takhruj* can be juxtaposed with *yanṭaliqu*, examined above, to consider that the verse captures two different and complementary movements to Jerusalem: entering Jerusalem, and departing from it. As the peoples of the earth rapidly stream to come *into* Jerusalem, the words of Yahweh and his teachings (Heb. *torah*) go forth *from* Zion, without interruption. This ongoing movement highlights the significance of Jerusalem as an active religious center of global attention and interest, wholeheartedly welcoming worshipers and spreading the words of Yahweh who resides amongst his holy people in Zion.

Jerusalem's magnificence is further intensified in Saʿadia's translation as he translates the Hebrew phrase *devar Yahweh* ("word" or "saying" of Yahweh, in the singular) by the Arabic *kalam Allah*. Arabic *kalam* is the plural of the singular noun *kalima*. This is in line with the Islamic theological use of the Arabic phrase, since the Qurʾan is described by Muslims as *kalam Allah* ("words of Allah"). The medieval Christian Arabic versions use the term *kalimat al-rab* ("word [in the singular] of the Lord"). The use of the plural amplifies the significance of Yahweh's words that go forth from Zion, thus asserting that Yahweh in his magnificence has *many words* originating from his holy abode in Zion, not only *one word*. Moreover, this use again reflects Saʿadia's subtle polemical stance, brilliantly imbued in the Arabic lexicon of his translation. It is as if he is saying to his Jewish but possibly also Muslim readers: what the Muslims call the "words of Allah," which is the name of their Holy Qurʾan, is actually what the ancient Hebrew prophets called *devar Yahweh*. The biblical Jacob is your Jacob, and so on. Does this mean that Jerusalem also should be more like its biblical depiction at the end of days, as found in Isaiah?

Conclusions

Haggai Ben-Shammai points out that Saʿadia was faced with the task of rendering the sacred text of Judaism into a language that had become the

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46. Mustafa, *Al-Moʾjamam Al-Wasset*, 224.

47. Al-Murtaḍá al-Husaynī Al-Zabīdī, *Tāj Al-ʿArūs*, 5 vols (Kuwait: Arabic Heritage, 1969), 5:508.

vehicle for a new, expanding religion with imperial backing.[48] His task could be seen as being both an attempt to Judaize the Arabic language and to Arabize Judaism. The observations in this essay have shown that Sa'adia's translations of the references to Jerusalem in Isaiah evidence his creativity and innovation, since he does not adhere to a style of a word-to-word literal translation. He interacts with the target language to provide new interpretative insights and meanings, so that the significance of Jerusalem, as he understands it, within the biblical source text, is powerfully expressed in Arabic and within a new non-biblical linguistic setting.

These observations also show that Sa'adia had great familiarity with and knowledge of Islamic theological and literary concepts and themes; yet, he employs them to serve his exegetical purpose, which is to draw attention to the importance and magnificence of Jerusalem as a leading holy city in biblical thought and in its Jewish understanding, and to differentiate between certain Islamic notions and Jewish ones. Indeed, he employs the Islamic terms within a biblical context, while retaining and enriching the distinctive character and spirit of the biblical text.

Sa'adia's Arabic is of a high register, and his word choice clearly manifests his depth of knowledge in the Arabic lexicon and qur'anic terminology. He eloquently crafts his translation to capture subtle theological meanings concerning Zion, thus benefiting from the wealth of Arabic vocabulary, creating a lively and powerful engagement with the biblical text and more venues for further reflection and interpretation. He invites the reader versed in the Arabic language to interact with the biblical text in each reading, and to have a thoughtful and continuous dialogue with its words.

Sa'adia's Arabic word choice for describing Jerusalem's deliverance shows he is not so much concerned with the actual fulfillment of the predictive dimension of biblical prophecy, but rather with the historical horizon of the biblical prophets themselves. The hopes and desires for Jerusalem's deliverance are kept alive, as expressed in his choice of words, while the aspirations for preserving Zion's glory cannot be limited to one historical reality or time setting. Each generation can experience Jerusalem's pivotal significance and its fascinating centrality in new, creative, inspiring, and innovative terms. Sa'adia successfully managed to assert that the stream-

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48. Haggai Ben-Shammai, *A Leader's Project: Studies in the Philosophical and Exegetical Works of Saadya Gaon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2015), 145.

ing of peoples to Jerusalem is a continuous action, an unhindered process of imperishable desire. Perhaps he had this desire, too. His attachment to Jerusalem is quite evident through his word choice. This attests to his awareness of Zion's everlasting and enduring theological stature, which cannot be tied merely to messianic expectations. In short, his translation succeeds not only in retaining the emotive aspects of the biblical text about Jerusalem but also in enriching it, augmenting the enduring presence of Jerusalem by using a nonbiblical language—Arabic, the sacred language of the Qur'an. The reader of his text in Arabic truly enjoys each word Sa'adia diligently and eloquently crafted, and is irresistibly invited to traverse the abundant meanings of Jerusalem's deliverance and its marvelous transformation.

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A Ninth-Century Text of Questions and Answers on Biblical Contradictions

David Sklare

The *genizot* of Cairo have preserved fragments of two Judeo-Arabic texts consisting of questions and answers on issues of consistency and apparent contradictions between biblical texts. In both texts, the authors are responding to questions asked by someone else. Both texts are anonymous, but internal indications allow us to date them tentatively to the middle of the ninth century CE. The two texts are similar in style and exegetical approach and may have been composed by the same author, although this cannot be established with any certainty. A few passages in the texts reflect a Christian cultural environment. This, together with the detailed knowledge of Armenia demonstrated in one of the texts, suggests that these texts were written in the area of northern Mesopotamia known by the Arabs as *al-Jazirah*. These texts and their cultural context are discussed in detail in my 2017 article.[1] An overview of the Judeo-Arabic genre of biblical questions and answers may be found in my earlier work (2007).[2] Selections from one text, which I call Text B, are presented here. Fragments of this text have been preserved in two manuscripts: SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:3292; and BL Or. 12299, fols. 26–27.

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1. David Sklare, "Ninth-Century Judeo-Arabic Texts of Biblical Questions and Answers," in *Senses of Scriptures, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, ed. Miriam Lindgren Hjälm, Biblia Arabica 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 104–24. The complete text from which the present selection is taken will be published in the future with a critical edition of the Judeo-Arabic text, together with an annotated English translation.

2. David Sklare, "Scriptural Questions: Early Texts in Judaeo-Arabic" [Hebrew], in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾan Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, ed. Meir Bar-Asher, Simon Hopkins, Sarah Stroumsa, and Bruno Chiesa (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007), 205–31.

Most of the questions addressed by our author are concerned with apparent contradictions on historical matters between different books of Scripture. The author's exegetical approach is rationalistic, almost scientific. This can be discerned in his answers and in the methodological statement found in his answer to Question 25 (given below). He is clearly a Rabbanite as he recommends studying Mishnah, Talmud, the Mekhiltot, Sifre, and Halakhot Pesuqot as preparation to dealing with questions of the sort he responds to in this text (evidently to sharpen one's mind). Nevertheless, he is critical of Aggadah and Midrash, an attitude found typically among the Geonim of the tenth century CE, from Sa'adia Gaon through Hayya Gaon.[3] Indeed, our author makes very little use of rabbinic exegesis when addressing the questions raised by the interlocutor.

In addition to his original solutions to exegetical problems, our author evidently had an unconventional approach to the redaction of the biblical text. In his response to Question 25, he appears to take the position that Ezra the scribe edited Scripture, interpolating editorial comments. While rabbinic tradition attributes to Ezra an important role in reestablishing the Torah after the Babylonian exile and even in comparing manuscripts and indicating doubtful words with dots, our author goes several steps further.[4] He may have been influenced by the Christian tradition that saw Ezra as the restorer and editor of all of Scripture, a tradition stemming from the story in 4 Ezra 14, in which Scripture is divinely revealed to Ezra. This image of Ezra may be found, for example, in Origen and Eusebius.[5] It would seem that our author's view of Ezra as editor is related to the idea of the *mudawwin* (compiler/editor) used by Jewish exegetes in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE.[6]

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3. For the approach of the later Geonim to Aggadah, see David Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and His Cultural World: Texts and Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 39, 42–47.

4. Richard Steiner ("A Jewish Theory of Biblical Redaction from Byzantium: Its Rabbinic Roots, Its Diffusion and Its Encounter with the Muslim Doctrine of Falsification," *JSIJ* 2 [2003]: 123–67) discusses a number of the rabbinic traditions. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (in ch. 3 of *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992]) discusses the polemical use of Ezra as editor in Muslim literature.

5. See Yonatan Moss, "Disorder in the Bible: Rabbinic Responses and Responsibilities," *JSQ* 19 (2012): 108 n. 7; and Moss, "Noblest Obelus: Rabbinic Appropriations of Late Ancient Literary Criticism," in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, ed. Maren R. Niehoff (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 252 n. 29.

6. See Haggai Ben-Shammai, "On the *Mudawwin*, the Redactor of the Hebrew

Our author and his readers assumed that the books of Scripture are to be read together as a unified text and that there should be no contradictions between different texts. While this assumption also underlies much midrashic exegesis, it may have found new emphasis in this period due to the understanding that Scripture had undergone an editing process by Ezra the priest. This is quite different from the approach of modern exegetes, who see the biblical texts as having been written by different authors in disparate historical contexts. This work, written in the early, nascent period of Judeo-Arabic culture, provides us with a small, limited window into the sorts of exegetical issues that occupied Jewish students of Scripture in the ninth century and how they sought to resolve them.[7]

Translation of Selected Passages

Different Measures: 2,000 Bat [Kings] or 3,000 Bat [Chronicles]?

12. You inquired about what it says in Kings, "It was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like that of a cup, like the petals of a lily. Its capacity was 2,000 *bat*" (1 Kgs 7:26); whereas in Chronicles it says, "It was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like that of a cup, like the petals of a lily. It held 3,000 *bat*" (2 Chr 4:5). [When it says] 2,000 *bat*, this is with a large measure, and when it says 3,000, this is with a small measure. We might possibly say today that a thing weighs three *raṭls* using the Baghdadi *raṭl*, but when using the Kufi *raṭl* it weighs something like two *raṭls*. Indeed, you see that pepper and saffron and similar things are measured with a *raṭl* whose weight is 260 (*dirhem*s). There are (also those who) use a *raṭl* of 400 (*dirhem*s). Oil is weighed using a *raṭl* of 130 (*dirhem*s) and with a *raṭl* of 300. It may be weighed with a *raṭl* of 165[8] (*dirhem*s). Since

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Bible in Judaeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis" [Hebrew], in *From Sages to Savants: Studies Presented to Avraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph R. Hacker, Yosef Kaplan, and B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2010), 73–110.

7. In the translations below, round parentheses indicate additions made by the translator in order to clarify the meaning of the text. Square brackets indicate text missing in the manuscripts due to holes and tears. Translation of biblical citations is from the Jewish Publication Society (JPS 1985), although altered at times to fit the author's intention. Titles have been added at the beginning of each question/answer so that the content will be clear to the reader.

8. The Judeo-Arabic text has ס ק'ה'. This may be an unusual way of indicating the number 165 or an abbreviation, a technique that the scribe uses in the next sentence.

this (use of different measurements) existed in the days of King Solomon, in this way (a vessel) of two thousand *bat* may also have held three (thousand) *bat*. Therefore, the matter is such that it can include all, fitting what is in Kings and what is said in Chronicles.[9]

Who Carried the Ark—The Priests [Kings] or the Levites [Chronicles]?

13. You inquired about what it says, "When all the elders of Israel had come, the priests lifted the Ark" (1 Kgs 8:3); whereas it says in Chronicles, "When all the elders of Israel had come, the Levites carried the Ark" (2 Chr 5:4). There it says "priests" and here it says "Levites" and you consider this contradictory. It is (however) not as you think, for the priests are called "sons of Levi." They would carry (with) the sons of Kehat,[10] as it says, "Do this with them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most sacred objects: let Aaron and his sons go in and assign each of them to his duties and to his porterage" (Num 4:19). The priests carried the ark of the Lord at the [crossing of the Jordan River, as it says,] "When the feet of the priests bearing the Ark of the Lord, the Sovereign of all the earth, come to rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan … will be cut off and will stand in a single heap" (Josh 3:13). In a similar manner, the Levites carried it until they came to the *devir* sanctuary, for they were not permitted to enter into the temple of the Lord. The table and the menorah and the incense altar were not placed in the *devir* of the temple. It (therefore) describes the Levites as carrying it up to the place permitted to them and then the priests carried it to the place where others are not permitted to carry it, and they brought it into the *devir* of the temple, all this in one day. The narrative here does not describe for us all of the procedure (in detail). It says, "Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the screening curtain and cover the Ark of the Pact with it" (Num 4:5). (Further on) it says, "When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sacred objects and all the furnishings of the sacred objects at the breaking of camp, only then shall the sons of Kehat come and lift

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9. Rabbinic literature has different answers to this problem. One answer, based on the difference between dry and liquid measurements, is found in Tosefta Kelim 5:2; Sifre Num. 42; Num. Rab. 11:7; b. Eruv. 14b has yet another approach.

10. The sons of Kehat are those Levites whose job it was to carry the holiest elements of the tabernacle, after the priests had covered them, lest the Levites perish from seeing the holiest things uncovered. See Num 4:1–20.

them, so that they do not come in contact with the sacred objects and die" (Num 4:15). If they (the sons of Aaron) carried for just one step, then Scripture would prove to be true.[11] How much more (did the priests carry the ark) as it describes the *devir* of the temple as being twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide (1 Kgs 6:20).[12]

Was Solomon's Sukkot Celebration Seven or Eight Days? Kings versus Chronicles

14. You inquired about what it says in Kings, "On the eighth day he let the people go. They bade the king good-bye and went to their tents" (1 Kgs 8:66); whereas it says in Chronicles, "On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he let the people return to their tents…" (2 Chr 7:10).[13] The idea here is that when Israel came on pilgrimage to celebrate a feast, they had tents with them in which to dwell around the city. He (Solomon) enjoined them to stand around the altar and pray until the burnt offering was completely consumed. Hezekiah, king of Judah, acted similarly as it says, "All the congregation prostrated themselves, the song was sung and the trumpets were blown—all this until the end of the burnt offering. When the offering was finished, the king and all who were there with him knelt and prostrated themselves" (2 Chr 29:28–29). On the eighth day, he sent them to their tents that were around the city and on the twenty-third (of the month) he sent them to their villages. For on the eighth day it would not have been permissible for them to carry their baggage and travel on the eighth day as it is a holy convocation (מקרא קודש). Villages can be called "tents," as it says, "The Judahites were routed by Israel, and each person fled to his tent (אהלו)" (2 Kgs 14:12), but they actually fled to their villages. ʾ*Ohalim* (אוהלים) are (also) called tents, as it says, "Now Dathan and Abiram had come out and they stood at the entrance of their

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11. That is, if the priests carried the various objects just one step in the process of covering them and getting them ready for the sons of Kehat.

12. That is, if the priests carried the tabernacle utensils to place them on the sons of Kehat, and that was considered carrying if only for one step—certainly when the priests carried the ark into the *devir*, which is twenty cubits in length, it should be understood as carrying the ark.

13. The issue here is that the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles falls on the twenty-second day of the month. On which day did King Solomon release the people to their tents (or homes), on the twenty-second or the twenty-third?

tents (אהליהם)" (Num 16:27); and as it says, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men" (Num 16:26). The word for a tent is 'ohel and the word for a village can (also be) 'ohel.[14]

Where Did Aaron Die? Numbers versus Deuteronomy

15. You inquired about what Scripture says, "From Be'erot-benei-Ya'akan, the Israelites marched to Moserah. Aaron died there and was buried there" (Deut 10:6); whereas (elsewhere) it says, "They set out from Kadesh and encamped at Hor Ha-Har, on the edge of the land of Edom. Aaron the priest ascended Hor ha-Har at the command of the Lord and died there" (Num 33:37–38). The idea here is that one name can refer to fifty villages, more or less. It could be that Hor ha-Har was one of the villages in Moserah. This is similar to what can be said about Armenia. It has a number of cities and many settlements which together are called Armenia, [such as …] and al-Adin[15] and Shakhi and Gakit and Guakh and K[…]shut and Shuranim and al-Harakh and Khagrund and al-Kunyah [… and] these places are many, being approximately one thousand places. All of them (together) are called Armenia and each also has its own name. This is true also of Syria and Byzantium, Khurasan, Khazaria, Sind, India, Ethiopia, Nubia, the Maghreb, and the land of the Sambation River. In each of these lands there are cities, villages, and fortresses that cannot be counted quickly. It is thus reasonable (to suggest) that Moserah was the name of the entire region and Hor ha-Har was within it, or Hor ha-Har was the name of the region and Moserah was within it. It is impossible to refute this explanation. It thus comes about that there is one meaning for the two verses.[16]

King Ahaziah's Death in Kings and Chronicles: A Contradiction?

16. You inquired about what it says in Chronicles, "He sent in search of Ahaziah, who was caught hiding in Samaria, was brought to Jehu, and

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14. For the rabbinic response to this issue, see Gen. Rab. 35:3. A different approach is found in b. Moʿed 9a and Tanḥ. Bereshit 13.

15. The transliterations of the place names are only conjectures. Some experts on Armenian toponyms have tried to identify these places, without much success. The spaces in the text […] here and elsewhere indicate lacunae in the manuscript.

16. The rabbinic response to this problem was to add some extra travels for the Israelites. See y. Yoma 1:1; Tanḥ. Huqqat 18, and parallel sources.

put to death. He was given a burial…" (2 Chr 22:9); whereas it says in Kings, "On seeing this, King Ahaziah of Judah fled along the road to Beth-haggan. Jehu pursued him and said, 'Shoot him down too!' (And they shot him) in his chariot at the ascent of Gur, which is near Ibleam. He fled to Megiddo and died there" (2 Kgs 9:27). You consider these two verses to be contradictory, but it is not as you think. For it says, "He fled to Megiddo and died there," and when a man flees, it is reasonable that his journey […] was the name of the city and name of the […] it was called "the mountains of Gilead" and the Gilead has many villages. Similarly, in the mountains of Samaria there were numerous villages and Megiddo was (one of) these in the district of Samaria. It is possible, however, that among the villages of Israel there were many small villages named Megiddo, just as you know that that there are two Zarephaths. Therefore, God said to the prophet, "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon" (1 Kgs 17:9).[17] Similarly, many villages with the same name are mentioned in Joshua. In Israel there was a city named Shomrom different from the city built by Omri, as it says in Joshua: "So King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent this message to King Hoham of Hebron (Josh 10:3) and to the king of Shimron-meron" (Josh 12:20).[18] The proof that the name of the mountain is Shomron (is in the verse) since it says, "Then he (Omri) bought the mountain of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he built [a town] on the mountain and named the town which he built after Shemer, the owner of the mountain" (1 Kgs 16:24). So the name of the mountain was Shomron and Ahaziah fled (there) and hid in a village named Megiddo, one of the villages on the mountain known as Shomron. They killed him in Megiddo and it is sound […] one is the name of the entire country [and the other is the name] of the village which is part of the country, as I have explained.

Which Tribes Remained Loyal to the House of David, Judah or also Benjamin?

18. You inquired about what it says, "However, I will not tear away the whole kingdom, I will give your son one tribe, for the sake of My servant

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17. The name Zarephath also appears in Obad 20. The author quotes only the verse referring to Zarephath of Sidon, understanding that the words "of Sidon" were added in order to distinguish this Zarephath from the other one.

18. The author has evidently put two different verses together, perhaps due to a faulty memory. The MT has *Shimron*, while our author has *Shomron*.

David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen" (1 Kgs 11:13). Moreover, it says, "But one tribe shall remain his…" (1 Kgs 11:32). And again it says, "Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the House of David" (1 Kgs 12:20). (On the other hand) in Chronicles it has, "… thus Judah and Benjamin were his" (2 Chr 11:12). There, (in Kings it says) "but one tribe" and here (in Chronicles) it counts two tribes. You therefore consider this to be contradictory. There is, however, no inconsistency here. For God had already related to the prophet that he would give Rehoboam one tribe at one time and two tribes after that, as it says, "Ahijah took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces" (1 Kgs 11:30). Then it says, "'Take ten pieces,' he said to Jeroboam. 'For thus said the Lord, the God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hands, and I will give you ten tribes'" (1 Kgs 11:31). Does this not indicate that two pieces are for Rehoboam? At the time, [the tribe of Benjamin] did not follow Rehoboam, as it says, "Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the House of David" (1 Kgs 12:20). The tribe of Benjamin, however, joined him later, as it says, "Take ten pieces" (1 Kgs 11:31). We have shown that Rehoboam would be given another tribe other than Judah, for Judah were followers of the house of David. Jeroboam had ten tribes and the remaining ones were therefore for Rehoboam, in a manner similar to David who first ruled over Judah and then later ruled over Israel and Judah. Thus, at first the tribe of Judah followed Rehoboam and then Benjamin joined it later on. The verse "I will give your son one tribe" (1 Kgs 11:13) indicates that he will give him another tribe, other than the tribe of Judah, as they were (already) the followers of his house. There is a clear proof in the verse "I will give you the ten tribes" (1 Kgs 11:35) that he promised to give ten tribes to Jeroboam and it is correct and he will give to Rehoboam two tribes and it is correct. There is no element of error in this, so understand and be rightly guided.

Saul and Ish-bosheth

25. Concerning what you inquired about, that it says, "Saul was a year old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel two years" (1 Sam 13:1);[19] and then it says, "Ish-bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he

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19. Modern biblical scholarship considers this verse to have a lacuna. For example, the JPS translation has "Saul was … years old" with the following note: "The number is lacking in the Hebrew Text; also, the precise context of the 'two years' is uncertain. The verse is lacking in the Septuagint."

became King of Israel and he reigned two years" (2 Sam 2:10). From this verse itself (it would seem) that Ish-bosheth was older than his father by thirty-eight years.[20] This is even more astonishing than the story of Aha-ziah and Jehoram his father,[21] for that concerned two years and this is thirty-eight. It is an amazing wonder. The question may (also) be asked in this manner. It could be said that Saul is described as having three sons, two daughters and his wife. There is no mention of Ish-bosheth among them and no […] name by a name as were the three that were named in (the book of) Samuel during the time of his reign. They were the ones who were killed in the battle with their father Saul, as it says, "Thus Saul and his three sons and his arms-bearer, as well as all his men, died together on that day" (1 Sam 31:6).

The greatly abbreviated answer is that these forty years of Ish-bosheth relate to an event[22] that occurred to him during these years. The inten-tion is to a certain issue that took place in the tenth year of Saul's life.[23] Saul fathered Ish-bosheth during this time period. He was the oldest and the reason that he is not mentioned in (the book of) Samuel is that he was not born by Ahinoam. Only her children were mentioned, as it says, "Saul's sons were: Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua: and the names of his two daughters were Merab, the older, and Michal, the younger" (1 Sam 14:49); but it does not say, "All of Saul's sons were…" Moreover, they are mentioned because of what will happen to them, that they will be killed on one occasion. Knowledge of this prepares us for what will happen to them. Ish-bosheth is not mentioned [here] because nothing of what befell them will happen to him.

Furthermore, every story that is not completed in one of these five books—Genesis, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Samuel, Kings, and Ezra—is com-pleted and explicated in Chronicles. Deuteronomy, however, does not mention anything that is in Chronicles, except for a few matters, such as the number of the sixty cities.[24] Since not all of the details of Saul's affairs were treated fully in Samuel, they were completed in Chronicles.

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20. Ish-bosheth reigned immediately after Saul.

21. A previous question dealt with a similar textual problem, where the biblical text seems to say that Ahaziah was two years older than his father.

22. Evidently, the event of Ish-Bosheth being made king.

23. The meaning of the Judeo-Arabic text is not very clear here, perhaps due to the author's brevity. It is also possible that there is a textual problem in the manuscript.

24. See Deut 3:4 and 1 Chr 2:23.

It describes Ish-bosheth and explains his affairs completely, except that it exchanged (the ending of his name) *sheth* with *ʿal*, such as Yeru*baʿal* instead of Yeru*boshet*, as in the verse, "Ner begot Kish, Kish begot Saul, Saul begot Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab, and Eshbaʿal" (1 Chr 8:33).

Similarly, in Genesis there is the narrative from Adam up through Jacob and his children, and Chronicles begins with this. (In the book of) Joshua, all of the allotments of land are mentioned in the same way as in Chronicles. Similarly, in Samuel and Kings there are the stories of the battles and the kings (that are also described in Chronicles). From Ezra, Chronicles describes those who settled in the land and the ranks of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the rest of the matters. […] In Ezra, it says, "But the Levite heads of clans are listed in the book of the chronicles to the time of Johanan son of Eliashib" (Neh 12:23),[25] and they are mentioned (in Chronicles) in the vicinity of the verse, "And Phinehas son of Eleazar was the chief officer over them in time past, and so on" (1 Chr 9:20). I do not mean the story of Asaf and the rest of the (men) whom David ranked,[26] but rather those who settled in Jerusalem (in the time) of the second temple.[27] As for Isaiah, only a little of it is mentioned in Chronicles, such as the story of Rezin king of Aram and Ahaz and the story of Hezekiah. As for the Psalms, there is very little of it, such as the verse "Praise the Lord; call on His name" (Ps 105:1; and see 1 Chr 16:8). As for (the book of) Ruth, there is only the narrative of David's family lineage.

Therefore, if you have a difficulty with some matter, or seek to comprehend the foundations of the questions concerning the historical traditions, examine all these books, contemplate carefully, and you will then gain broad knowledge and you will understand the matter. This is particularly true if you wear yourself out studying the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Mekhiltot, Halakhot Pesuqot, and Torat Kohanim (the Sifra), for they are the foundations. As for things like the Aggadah and Piyyut and similar things, do not decide on the basis of them at all. For they have been collected from interpretations (אלתאוליאת); and they contain some things which are true and some things that are not, all according to the breadth of the knowledge of the person who composed them.

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25. Ezra and Nehemiah were usually considered to be one book.

26. See 1 Chr 16:1–7; 25:1–31.

27. See 1 Chr 8:28, 32; 9:34, 38.

We consider these other passages[28] to be from Ezra the priest, except that the names of the scholars have been exchanged.[29] In this manner (we are to understand) what it says, "And the sun stood still and the moon halted, while a nation wreaked judgment on its foes—as it is written in the Book of Yashar" (Josh 10:13). This refers back to (the verse) "Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations" (Gen 48:19).[30] In the same manner, (the verse) "He ordered the Judahites (בני יהודה) to be taught the bow. It is recorded in the Book of Yashar" (2 Sam 1:18), refers back to (the verse) "You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes" (Gen 49:8).[31] Likewise, the verse "Ish-bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king of Israel, and he reigned two years" (2 Sam 2:10) is to inform us how old he was (as a son of) Saul[32] when he became king. He was forty years old, as it says "Ish-bosheth son of Saul was forty years old" and so on.[33]

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28. Referring to verses, or parts of verses, which seem to be later additions. He may be referring to passages he had mentioned above, such as the genealogy of David at the end of Ruth.

29. The intention of this last phrase is not clear. The two manuscripts vary here and the text has probably not been preserved accurately, as indicated by the problematic syntax.

30. The author (and rabbinic tradition) interpreted the verse in Joshua to be the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy for Ephraim, in that the halting of the sun and moon were witnessed by all the nations. This connection is found in a number of rabbinic sources which also understand "the Book of Yashar" as referring to Genesis, the book of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (who were known as *yesharim*, "upright"), strengthening the connection between these two verses. See b. Avod. Zar. 25a; Gen. Rab. 6; Aggadat Bereshit 5, ד"ה הבן יקיר, as well as later midrashic collections such as Lekah Tov. Our author evidently took the verse in Josh 10:13 to be an editorial addition by Ezra the priest.

31. This second example of a reference to *Sefer ha-Yashar* is also found in b. Avod. Zar. 25a. The verse in 2 Samuel says that the descendants of Judah knew how to use the bow. The verse from Genesis implies this by saying that Judah's hand will be on his enemies' nape, hinting at the use of the bow in which the archer's hand is drawn back close to the nape of the neck.

32. The Judeo-Arabic text has: ליפידנא בן כם כאן לשאול פי וקת מלך. The mention of Saul here may be a scribal error. The sentence would flow better if it read: ליפידנא בן כם כאן לאיש בשת פי וקת מלך.

33. Our author evidently also sees this verse as an editorial interpolation by Ezra the priest.

If you were to ask what is the meaning of the verse "Saul was a year old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel two years" (1 Sam 13:1), I would give three answers. The first (answer) is that it means to say that he was like a one-year-old, with the goodness of an infant who has no sin.[34] [The text of the second answer is too fragmentary in the manuscript to translate.] The third answer is that it refers to the year in which the king was anointed (with oil) and that his state (of being anointed) would not be protracted like it was for David. He remained anointed for two years until he became king over Judah and seven years until he became king over all of Israel, for after David became king of Judah, Israel remained without a king for five years. It said about David, "The Philistine officers asked, 'Who are those Hebrews?' 'Why, that's David, the servant of King Saul of Israel,' Achish answered the Philistine officers. 'He has been with me for a year or more…'" (1 Sam 29:3).[35] It is for this reason that it has "Saul was a year old when he became king" and so on, that is, from the time of his anointment.

I have instructed you and have explained this question and its ramifications to you with a clear explanation. So give generous consideration to it. It comprises seven (sub-)issues that have been clarified in our answer. Moreover, I have shown to you and informed you about the obscure stories in the twenty-four books. In the same manner, for that passage whose explication is not completed at the end of Kings, it is completed at the end of Jeremiah. The remaining part of the obscure narrative about the nations of the world is explained in Ezekiel and some in Isaiah and the Minor Prophets. That which is not clarified in the four books is explained in the fifth book. With all that you have studied in Scripture, the difficult matters will become easy for you, as it says, "…and giving the sense; so they understood the scriptures" (Neh 8:8).

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34. This is the answer given in rabbinic literature. See b. Yoma 22b; y. Bik. 3:6; Pes. Rab., First Addition, *piska* 1.

35. Our author quotes this verse to demonstrate that, at the time David was serving in the army of Achish the Philistine, more than a year had passed since he was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13), and it would still be more time until David reigned as king.

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The Meaning of "The Great House" and
"The Little House" in Medieval Jewish Exegesis

Meirav Nadler-Akirav

The terms "the great house" and "the little house" appear in Amos 6:11:

כי־הנה יהוה מצוה והכה הבית הגדול רסיסים והבית הקטן בקעים

For behold, the Lᴏʀᴅ commands, and the *great house* shall be smitten into fragments and the *little house* into bits. (RSV, emphasis added)

The prophet Amos turns to the sinful people, those who pursue pleasure and put trust in their power, describes their harsh sins, and then declares that terrible calamities are expected to come upon them. As part of these disasters, the prophet claims in verse 11 that the great house and the little house will be smashed into fragments and bits.

The question is: What are those two houses, which are differentiated by size and the type of "smiting" that will come upon them and destroy them? A study of medieval exegesis raises various possibilities for understanding these expressions. The notion common to all is that it is indeed a description of part of the punishment that will be given to the people for their sins.

This paper focuses on the different approaches of understanding the meaning of the terms "the great house" and "the little house" as it is reflected in several medieval Jewish thinkers' exegesis, both Karaites and rabbinical, such as Saʿadia Gaon, Daniel al-Qūmisī, David ben Abraham Alfāsī, Yefet ben ʿEli, Ibn Ezra, R. David Kimchi, and Rashi.[1]

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1. For a review of medieval Jewish thinkers who translated the books of the Minor Prophets into Arabic, see Meira Polliack and Meirav Nadler-Akirav, "Minor Prophets: Primary Translations: Arabic Translations," in *Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*,

Two Houses—Two Kingdoms

We first find the interpretation of the two houses as two kingdoms in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (the accepted and earliest Jewish Bible translation into Aramaic) and in Yefet ben ʿEli's exegesis.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan explains: ארי הא יי מפקיד וימחי מלכו רבא מחא תקיפא ומלכו זעירא מחא חלשא, meaning: "God will destroy the great kingdom with a great blow and the little kingdom with a small blow." Even though it is not clear who the "great kingdom" and the "little kingdom" are, we can assume that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan refers to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.[2] Rashi cites the targum and explains: "According to its importance, so will the blow be," but we cannot infer from that as to the purpose of Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Joseph ben Simeon Kara' (France/Germany, eleventh–twelfth century), who was one of Rashi's pupils, quotes the targum and explains: "He calls the ten tribes 'the big house'; and he calls the tribes of Judea and Benjamin 'the little house,' because the ten tribes are more than the tribes of Judea and Benjamin, as Ezekiel says: 'And your elder sister is Samaria … and your younger sister' (Ezek 16:46 RSV)."[3]

The possibility that the two houses should be identified, according to their relative size, as the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, appears also in Yefet ben ʿEli's commentary on the book of Amos.[4] Yefet explains that "the

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vol. 1 B of *The Hebrew Bible*, ed. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, Textual History of the Bible (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 652–59.

2. See also the interpretation of *Mezudat David* (seventeenth century) to the book of Amos.

3. Menachem Cohen, ed., *Mikraʾot Gedolot ʿHaketer': The Twelve Prophets* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2012), 129, 131.

4. For discussion of the metaphorical interpretation of the Bible, and especially in the book of Amos, see Meirav Nadler-Akirav, "The Literary-Historical Approach of Yefet Ben ʿEli in His Commentary of the Book of Amos," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 10.2 (2016): 175–93; Nadler-Akirav, "Yefet Ben ʿEli's Commentary on the Book of Amos: A Critical Edition of Chapters 1–4 with Hebrew Translation, Introduction, and Notes" (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2009), 5–57 (written under the guidance of Prof. Eliezer Schlossberg and Prof. David Doron). On Yefet's exegesis and approaches, see Meira Polliack and Eliezer Schlossberg, *Yefet Ben'Eli's Commentary on Hoshea—Annotated Edition, Hebrew Translation and Introduction* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 17–40; Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 393–98; Michael G. Wechsler, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet Ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Book of*

great house" and "the little house" are a metaphor for Israel and Judah, respectively, that they will be exiled by the kings of Assyria, like Nebuchadnezzar, who did so on four occasions. Here is the first example, in English translation:

> Saying: "And the great house shall be struck down into fragments," he is referring to the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, which is the house of Israel. Saying "the little house," he is referring to the kingdom of Judah. He likened them to a house that is struck relentlessly by heavy rains and with no one to rebuild it, so it is destroyed. Thus the kings of Assyria went to the land of Israel time after time and exiled the people until the kingdom came to an end and the land was destroyed. And he likened the kings of Assyria to a flood and hail, saying: "Behold, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters" (Isa 28:2 RSV). And he likened the destruction of the house of Judah to the crevices found in the wall of the house and in its ceiling, and there is no one who can build it and so it becomes ruined. Like this Nebuchadnezzar came to them four times and every time he had a great influence on them like the crevices in the wall of a house until the kingdom of Judah was destroyed.[5]

This example emphasizes the importance of history as a means for proving the precision of Yefet's interpretations. Yefet's exegesis of the Bible reveals two main exegetical approaches. The first is the contemporary-symbolic approach, by which it is understood that the text alludes symbolically to the past and present history, as well as the future, of the Karaite movement and its destiny.[6] The second approach is the literary approach, which is

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Esther, Karaite Texts and Studies 1, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 13–40; Marzena Zawanowska, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet Ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10–25:18)* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 111–88.

5. Translated from MS SP RNL Library Yevr.-Arab. 1:298 (433) (IMHM 54886), 112b–113a.

6. Meira Polliack and Eliezer Schlossberg, "Historical-Literary, Rhetorical and Redactional Methods of Interpretation in Yefet Ben ʿEli's Introduction to the Minor Prophets," in *Exegesis and Grammar in Medieval Karaite Texts*, ed. Geoffrey Khan, JSSSup 13 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6; Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary on Hoshea*, 20; Naphtali Wieder, *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism* (London: East and West Library, 1962), 53–67; Wieder, "The Dead Sea Scrolls Type of Biblical Exegesis among the Karaites," in *Between East and West* (London: East

the more common method applied in Yefet's commentary on the Prophets. This method can be divided into two types: the linguistic-contextual method and the historical method.[7] Both types are on biblical evidence taken from references to other biblical texts.

Later on, in his commentary on Amos 6:11, Yefet explains the shards and cracks mentioned in this verse by way of a metaphor: the rain fell on the house constantly, so that no one could rebuild and repair it. We find a similar explanation in David ben Abraham Alfāsī's dictionary:

> And from that, the cracking of the walls and ramparts and striking the large house into splinters [רסיסים] and the little house into fragments [בקעים] are cracks in the wall. Splinters are the rainfall that comes into these cracks and easily topples them.[8]

And he adds:

> "And striking the great house with splinters [רסיסים]" means that rain will strike it and enter the cracks and this [is the meaning] when later on he says "crevices [בקעים]," referring to the two houses at once: when he says about the one "splinters" it necessitates the other; and when he says about the other one "crevices" it necessitates the first, meaning if the [walls] of the houses are fissured, rain will enter and they will be destroyed.[9]

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and West Library, 1958), 75–76; Rina Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Hameuhad, 1988), 106–10.

7. On historicizing as a primary tool in Yefet's biblical commentaries, see Meira Polliack, "Historicizing Prophetic Literature: Yefet Ben ʿEli's Commentary on Hosea and Its Relationship to al-Qūmisī's Pitron," in *Pesher Naḥum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, Presented to Norman (Naḥum) Golb*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Michael G. Wechsler, with the participation of Fred Donner, Joshua Holo, and Dennis Pardee, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 66 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 149–86; Polliack and Schlossberg, "Historical Literary, Rhetorical and Redactional Methods," 1–39; Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet Ben ʿEli's Commentary on Hoshea*, 21–25.

8. I. D. Markon, *Pitron Shneym ʿAsar, perush l-itrey ʿasar hibro Daniel al-qumisi* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Meqitsei Nirdamin, 1957), 1:263.

9. S. L. Skoss, *Kitab Jamiʾ Al-Alfāẓ of David Ben Abraham Al-Fasi*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936–1945), 2:614. David ben Abraham al-Fāsī was a lexicographer, grammarian, and commentator active in the tenth century; he wrote an

Later on, Yefet explains that the rain is a metaphor for the kings of Assyria, who are likened to hail in Isa 28:2:

הנה חזק ואמץ לאדני כזרם ברד שער קטב כזרם מים כבירים שטפים
See, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters. (NRSV)

Here, Yefet elaborates upon the metaphor:

> And he mentioned three things: a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, a storm of mighty, overflowing waters [זרם ברד שער קטב כזרם מים שטפים]. And these three things are an image of the three exiles. The first exile is of the two tribes by Pul and Tiglath. This, he likened to "a storm of hail" because of the strength of their deeds. And the second exile is the exile of Zebulun and Naphtali by Tiglath in the period of Pekah ben Remalyahu. This, he likened to a "destroying tempest," because his deed was even more powerful than that of Pul. The third exile is the exile of Samaria. This, he likened to "a storm of mighty, overflowing waters" because he exiled all of the Ten Tribes. [10]

Saʻadia Gaon, in his commentary on Isa 28:2, also explains the verse by way of metaphor. In his commentary, though, the water destruction is not a metaphor for Assyria but, rather, for the harsh decrees and calamities that will be brought by God.[11] Even so, we cannot conclude from Saʻadia's exegesis to Isaiah that this is also his interpretation of Amos 6:11. Neither can we determine whether he understands "the great house" and "the small house" as a metaphor of the ten tribes and two tribes kingdoms or for the destruction of the First and Second Jerusalem Temples, or as a general description of punishment. This difference highlights Yefet's literary-historical approach, which searches in the Bible for the precise events alluded to by the verses under discussion.

Arabic dictionary of biblical grammar called *Kitāb jāmiʾ al-Alfāẓ*. For more details, see Skoss's introduction to *Kitab Jamiʾ al-Alfaẓ* (*Jāmiʾ*, 1:xxxii–xl).

10. Translated from MS BL 280a (IMHM 6274), 4b.

11. Yehuda Ratzaby, *Saadya's Translation and Commentary on Isaiah, Collected, Edited with Translation and Notes by Yehuda Ratzaby* [Hebrew] (Kiriat Ono: Mekhon Mishnat ha-Rambam, 1993), 55.

Two Houses—The First Temple and the Second Temple

Similar to the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and to Yefet ben ʿEli, we find
a contemporary-symbolic interpretation in the exegesis of the Kara-
ite Daniel al-Qūmisī (tenth century). In his book *Pitrōn Shneim ʿAsar*,
which includes a commentary on the Minor Prophets, Daniel al-Qūmisī
too explains Amos 6:11 as a metaphor; however, according to him the
metaphor refers to the destruction of the First and Second Temples. He
indicates that the First Temple will be destroyed easily and that, in con-
trast to the Second Temple, the latter would require a severe blow to be
destroyed:

> The first house, in a slight blow, as [Heb.] *rəsîsîm*, [Arab.] *rashāsh*, a
> little from the measly (part) of the land and it will soon be built; and the
> second house in a great blow, as water flows and as *mêmê bəqîʿîm* [Heb.,
> "overflowing waters"], cruel enemies.[12]

Two Houses—A Metaphor for Two Different Sins

We also find interpretations of the "houses" as a metaphor for different
kinds of people who commit different kinds of sins. Abraham Ibn Ezra
divides the people into two types accordingly to the size of their houses:
"big" and "small"—which probably means rich people and poor people, or
privileged people and ordinary people. Ibn Ezra explains: "And it is like a
parable, meaning: the big [people] committed more sins, the sins that the
small [people] did not commit,"[13] meaning, the sins of the leaders and the
rich are greater than those of the common people. He also brings an anon-
ymous interpretation that refers to "the minister and his people."[14] Rabbi
Eliezer of Beaugency (France, twelfth century CE) similarly explains: "The
king's house and the ministers' houses."[15]

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12. Markon, *Pitron Shneym ʿAsar*, 37.
13. Uriel Simon, *Hoshea, Joel, Amos*, vol. 1 of *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Two Commen-
taries on the Minor Prophets: An Annotated Critical Edition* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan:
Bar-Ilan University Press, 1989), 309–10.
14. Simon, *Abraham Ibn Ezra*, 241.
15. Cohen, *Mikraʾot Gedolot ʿHaketer': The Twelve Prophets*, 129.

The Word "House" in Amos 3:15

The word "house" is also mentioned in Amos 3:15:

והכיתי בית־החרף על־בית הקיץ ואבדו בתי השן וספו בתים רבים נאם־יהוה

"I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall come to an end," says the LORD. (RSV)

Rabbi David Kimhi (RaDak, twelfth–thirteenth century CE) finds a connection between Amos 6:11 and Amos 3:15; he claims that the destruction of "the great house" and "the little house" is similar to the fall of the houses mentioned in the latter and that both of them are symbolic of the similar disasters to come.[16] In his exegesis to Amos 3:15, Kimhi explains that it was the custom of kings to build special seasonal homes, either winter or summer, an explanation that is not found in his own exegesis to Amos 6.[17]

According to Kimhi's interpretation of both verses, we can assume that he means that a big disaster will come in the future, one that will crush all the houses, even the biggest and greatest one.

Yefet ben ʿEli, in his commentary on Amos 3:15, also refers to different kinds of houses, but he does not make a connection between the two verses. While in his commentary to Amos 6 he declares that the houses are a metaphor of the fall of the two kingdoms, here—in his commentary on Amos 3—he produces a literal interpretation, in which the verse refers to the peoples' houses and homes. He even forecasts how their houses will be destroyed: the enemy will destroy the houses at a time they will still live in them, or the enemy will exile the people and then destroy their houses:

> He refers to those houses, and divides them into four (types of) houses: some of them are winter houses … some summer houses … some houses of marble … and some palaces … those houses will be destroyed in two ways: either the enemy will destroy them, or they will be destroyed when their inhabitants will be exiled from them; and they will remain so year after year, with no one left to rebuild them and (full of) rain and flood waters.[18]

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16. Cohen, *Mikraʾot Gedolot ʿHaketer': The Twelve Prophets*, 129–30.

17. Cohen, *Mikraʾot Gedolot ʿHaketer': The Twelve Prophets*, 113.

18. Translation made from MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:298 (433) (IMHM 54886),

This is in contrast to Daniel al-Qūmisī, who presents a metaphorical explanation for both verses (Amos 6:11 and 3:15). But, while in Amos 6 al-Qūmisī refers to the fall of the temples, in 3:15 he presents an allegorical interpretation with an implied reference to his own time. According to him, the text implies the punishment that will befall the people in exile in general and the people of the Babylonian exile in particular:

כבוד מלכים הראשונים וגם כל עושר וכל כבוד אנשי גלות... ואף כי אוי
לכם יא עשירי גלות ועשירי ישראל בבבל נוטעי גנות ופרדסים... ותשכחו
תורתה ואבל ירושלם.

The honor of the first kings, and also all wealth and all respect of the people of exile…. Woe unto you, the rich people of the exile, and the rich people of Israel, who plant gardens and orchards…. Forgetting his Torah and the mourning for Jerusalem.[19]

Summary

The word combinations "the great house" and the little house are examples of expressions that are interpreted in different ways but are understood metaphorically within a context of destruction. They are read as denoting a disaster that is about to come in the near or distant future. Among medieval thinkers, there are three main approaches to understanding the metaphorical function of these expressions within their biblical (Amos and Isaiah) contexts.

The first approach is represented by the Aramaic targum (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan), where the two houses are explained as a metaphor for *two kingdoms*. Later Jewish thinkers, like Rashi and Josef ben Simeon Kara', suggest that Targum Pseudo-Jonathan points to the biblical First Temple period kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. A similar interpretation appears in the commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli on the book of Amos. Yefet explains in detail how the kings of Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar acted again and again until the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were destroyed.

98a. The ellipsis here and in the next excerpt indicates a skip in the translation for the sake of brevity.

19. Markon, *Pitron Shneym 'Asar*, 34.

The second approach is found in the commentary by Daniel al-Qūmisī. In his interpretation, the destruction of the houses is a metaphor for the destruction of the *First and Second Temples*.

According to the third approach, which is found among commentators like Abraham ibn Ezra and Eliezer of Beaugency, we can infer from the difference between the sizes of the houses about the type of people dwelling in them and the type of punishment they would receive. This means that the *size* of the house indicates the status of the person living in it: rich people such as the elite live in the big houses, whereas simple people live in small houses. Sin and its punishment are in direct proportion to the status of the house inhabitant and the house size: the richer the person, the greater the sin and punishment. Rabbi David Kimhi even refers to the custom of some people to build different houses for each season and finds a connection between Amos 6:11 and 3:15.

To sum up, even when there is almost a consensus that a particular verse, phrase, or term in the Bible has a metaphorical denotation, we can still find that the metaphor is interpreted as having multiple meanings.

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On the Writings

Yefet Ben 'Eli on Proverbs 30:1–6

Ilana Sasson

Introduction

Yefet ben 'Eli, the tenth-century CE Karaite exegete who lived and worked in Jerusalem, translated the Bible into Arabic and wrote a commentary on the entire Bible in the same language. A critical edition of his translation and commentary on the book of Proverbs was published recently.[1] The edition was prepared according to fifteen manuscripts, the oldest of which was copied in Arabic script in the eleventh century CE (BL Or 2553). Others were copied in the fifteen, seventeen, and nineteen centuries, and were written in Hebrew script. The edition is diplomatic, based primarily on this BL Or 2553 manuscript. However, because this manuscript contains only about half the text, the rest was taken from a fifteenth-century manuscript at the British Library that contains almost the entire text.[2] The rest was taken from a seventeenth-century manuscript that contains the entire corpus.[3] All other manuscripts are represented in the apparatus. As a result, and in order to best reflect the manuscripts, the critical edition is presented in a combination of Arabic and Hebrew script.

The corpus of Yefet's work on Proverbs is enormous. It would have been impractical to publish Yefet's edition in addition to an introduction and a translation of his work into English all in one volume. It was therefore

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1. Ilana Sasson, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben Eli on the Book of Proverbs*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

2. BL Or 2506 and BL Or 2507.

3. Adler 3356 and Adler 3357, in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, NY.

decided to publish the edition together with an introduction in the first volume and the English translation in a second volume.[4]

The process of preparing a critical edition necessitates some deliberation and decision making. For example, one of the questions I was faced with was how to translate Yefet's Arabic translation of the biblical text into English. Yefet's translation is extremely imitative and purposely wooden or stiff, following the Hebrew text very closely. For Yefet, it is not about the Arabic. It is about representing the Hebrew as accurately as possible. The English translation must reflect this feature even if the final product comes across as wooden and stiff as well. In addition, the book of Proverbs includes many terms that recur often such as "wise," "righteous," "wicked," "fool," and so on. It is important to be consistent in the translation with regard to such terms. Yet, one has to take into account the degree of consistency found in Yefet's translation, as well as the level of consistency found among the different manuscripts. While Yefet is fairly consistent with some of the terms, we see that there is a discrepancy among the different manuscripts with regard to certain terms.[5]

One other feature of Yefet's translation is the expansion of meaning. When a Hebrew word is polysemic or homonymic and must be translated by different Arabic words according to their context, Yefet chooses one of the Arabic words and consistently translates the Hebrew word with that one regardless of the context. Thus he expands the meaning of the Arabic word in light of the semantic field of the Hebrew word. This is a known feature of Yefet's translation, and has already been described by other scholars.[6] Clearly, it was not possible to imitate Yefet's expansion in the English translation: it is therefore important to reflect this feature by other means, such as footnotes and the use of parenthesis.

One feature of Yefet's writing style is the abundance of Hebrew words and terms embedded in his Arabic commentary. On the one hand, it would

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4. Editor's note: Sasson prepared substantial parts of the second volume, containing the English translation of this work, with which she entrusted Meira Polliack and Michael G. Wechsler, for the purpose of its future completion and publication.

5. For example, the rendition of the word *kaśil* ("fool") in BL Or 2553 is almost always *jāhil*, whereas it is rendered as *aḥmaq* in most other manuscripts.

6. Joshua Blau and Simon Hopkins, "The Beginning of Judaeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis according to an Old Glossary to the Book of Psalms" [Hebrew], in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai*, ed. Meir M. Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2007), 249–51.

be important for the reader to see this feature; but on the other, it would be very cumbersome to include the terms in Hebrew and add their translation into English in parenthesis, as it would disturb the reading flow. I therefore chose not to reflect this feature on a regular basis in the English version, except for cases in which it is essential for the point that Yefet conveys. One other consideration was how to represent the name of God, *Allah*. Should it be transliterated into English, or should one use a different term?[7] In the current edition I have decided to use "the Lord" to present the Arabic *Allah*, which stands for the Hebrew *Yhwh*, and "God" to present the Arabic *Ilāha*, which stands for the Hebrew *Elohim*. The editors of other editions chose to represent the name of God in different ways.[8]

An essential feature of a critical edition is the apparatus. In the case of my edition, the body of the text is written in Arabic. As mentioned above, some of it is written in Arabic script and some in Hebrew script, whereas the introduction is written in English. Therefore questions arise: In what language should the apparatus be written? Should it be in agreement with the body of the text, meaning in Arabic? Or should it be in agreement with the introduction, meaning in English? Or should it be in agreement of the Hebrew script, meaning in Hebrew? When looking at previous publications in the same series (Brill's Karaite Texts and Studies), we see that the apparatuses of the Esther edition, the Genesis edition, and the Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth editions are written in Hebrew.[9] In the edition at hand, I have decided to present the apparatus in English in order for it to be in agreement with the introduction and the paratext of this publication.

The following is an excerpt from Yefet's translation and commentary on Proverbs. Yefet uses Prov 30:1–6 as a polemical platform in which he attacks the study of secular sciences, cosmology in particular.[10] He con-

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7. See, for example, James T. Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology, Opposition to Philosophy: The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Salmon ben Yeroham on Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)*, Karaite Texts and Studies 5, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See also Michael Wechsler, ed., *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben'Eli the Karaite on the Book of Esther*, Karaite Texts and Studies 1, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

8. See, for example, Wechsler, *Esther*; and Robinson, *Asceticism*.

9. Wechsler, *Esther*; Marzena Zawanowska, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10–25:18)*, Karaite Texts and Studies 4, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Robinson, *Asceticism*.

10. For a detailed discussion of this passage in Hebrew, see Haggai Ben-Shammai,

demns those who pursue foreign books (Arab. *al-kutub al-barrāniyya*) and foreign knowledge, the kind that stands in contradiction to Scripture. Yefet suggests that there is some superfluous knowledge that God bestows on special individuals, such as King Solomon. Solomon did not learn this knowledge from books or from teachers; he received it directly from God. In fact, this, according to Yefet, is proof of the existence of God. This knowledge is not for anyone to possess, but only for those special individuals whom God chooses. God created the world for the sake of the Law (Arab. *al-šarīa*), by which he means: the Torah. Since the Torah is perfect, we are prohibited from adding anything to or subtracting anything from it. He explains that any addition, including knowledge pertaining to the wonders of creation, which is beyond human comprehension, is prohibited and its pursuance will not go unpunished.[11] He warns the average aspirant not to look for this type of knowledge because of the risks involved. He urges people to adhere to the Torah, saying that the knowledge it contains is all one needs in order to live well in this world, and to gain reward in the world to come.

<center>Yefet's Translation of Proverbs 30:1–6</center>

In the ensuing I shall present the Hebrew text of Prov 30:1–6, verse by verse, together with an English rendering of Yefet's Arabic translation.[12]

<center>1 דברי אגור בן־יקה המשא נאם הגבר לאיתיאל לאיתיאל ואכל</center>
The exhortation of *al-majmūʿ son of al-mutaqayyiʾ* (literally: "the poised one, son of the one who spews") is a story, at the outset of which the man proclaims, "Regarding the existence of the Omnipotent, regarding the existence of the Omnipotent, I am capable."

"The Doctrines of Religious Thought of Abû Yûsuf Yaʿqûb a-Qirqisânî and Yefet ben ʿElî" [Hebrew], 2 vols. (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977), 1:102–5; 2:274–78.

11. Lists of curriculums compiled by later Karaites suggest that the opposition to the study of secular sciences was eased after a while. Such lists include the study of mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy, among others; see Simcha Assaf and Samuel Glick, eds., *Mekorot le-toldhot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2001), 2:609–10, 619–20. See also Sasson, *Proverbs*, 119–20.

12. For the text in Arabic, see Sasson, *Proverbs*, 497–501.

2 כי בער אנכי מאיש ולא־בינת אדם לי

I have been ignorant among people, and I have no human under-standing.

3 ולא־למדתי חכמה ודעת קדשים אדע

I have not learned wisdom, but I have known the knowledge of the distinguished natures.

4 מי עלה־שמים וירד מי אסף־רוח בחפניו מי צרר־מים בשמלה מי הקים
כל־אפסי־ארץ מה־שמו ומה־שם־בנו כי תדע

Who ascended to the heavens and came down, who gathered the wind in his palms, who collected water in a garment, who estab-lished the ends of the earth, what is the person's name, and his son's name, so that you know.

5 כל־אמרת אלוה צרופה מגן הוא לחסים בו

All divine words are pure, he is like a shield to all who humble themselves before him.

6 אל־תוסף על־דבריו פן־יוכיח בך ונכזבת

Do not add to his exhortation lest he rebuke you and you be sev-ered by his hand.

Yefet's Commentary on Proverbs 30:1–6

(on v. 1) His saying, "the words of Agur" end with "the words of Lemuel." "Agur" is Solomon, who has five names, and they are: Solomon, Jedidiah, Agur, Lemuel, and Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes).[13] Each one of these five names has a meaning. He names him Solomon in light of the idea, "And I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his time" (1 Chr 22:9). He names him Jedidiah for the Lord loved him, as per the saying, "And the Lord loved him" (2 Sam 12:24). He names him Agur for he is like a collection of certain things in one place. It is derived from the idiom "collecting it in the time of the harvest" (Prov 6:8). It is as if he obtains secular knowledge and religious knowledge of every matter. He names him this name here,

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13. Clarifications, biblical references, and additions are contained in round parentheses.

I mean Agur, for it is befitting this chapter. He names him Lemuel for he is "the substitute of the Lord on earth,"[14] as we shall explain in its place. He names him Qoheleth because he gathers all the wise and the learned around him in order that they listen to his wisdom, as we shall explain in the introduction to Qoheleth with the help of the Lord, exalted.[15] He says, "son of Jakeh," perhaps pointing to David, peace upon him, for he also was wise and used to compose psalms by the "holy spirit," meaning by divine inspiration. Solomon fits this description too. He says, "son of Jakeh," comparing him with someone who spews the contents of his guts when his stomach is too full. So too, knowledge increases in his heart and he utters it, cooing it like the coo of a dove. He says, *ha-maśśaʾ*, this term indicates prophecy, and since he conveys laws (inspired) by the divine spirit, he says, *ha-maśśaʾ*. It is also possible to interpret *ha-maśśaʾ* as "story," similarly to "the story (*maśśaʾ*) that his mother taught him" (Prov 31:1). He says, *divrey Agur* ("the exhortation of Agur"), asserting that it is a story he authored after "the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov 1:1; 10:1; and 25:1). His saying "*Neʾum ha-gever*" ("the exhortation of the man") points to the aforementioned Agur. By his saying *le-Ithiel* ("to Ithiel"), he asserts that this exhortation deals with matters pertaining to the existence of the Creator.

He repeats "to Ithiel" twice. The first is related to the existence of the Creator alone, for he is the Preexistent (Arab. *al-qadīm*) by his essence. He was never in a state of nonexistence, and none precedes him, for everything else is created, not preexisting. The second "to Ithiel" points to his existence after the existence of the universe, for he will never expire. With regard to this attribute ("Preexistent"), none of the theologians who discuss the Creator differ, for they all profess his (eternal) existence. They might, however, disagree with regard to his (other attributes such as) the Wise, the Omnipotent. Hence the wise one (= Solomon) mentions (here)

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14. Yefet uses the Arabic expression *khalīfat Allah fi al-arḏ*, which is a well-known theological definition of the leader in Islamic literature. See also Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

15. This commentary about the five names of Solomon is also found in a very similar version in the commentary of Salmon b. Yerūḥam the Karaite on Qoh 1:1; see Robinson, *Asceticism*, 96, 174–77. See also Moshe I. Riese, "The Arabic Commentary of Solomon ben Yeruham the Karaite on Ecclesiastes" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1973), 111.

an attribute which none of the monotheists (Arab. *al-muʾaḥḥadīn*) deny, rather they all confirm.

He says, "*ve-ukhal*" (Yefet: "I am capable"), meaning "I can establish evidence and proof for his existence." He had already mentioned evidence for that, saying (on vv. 2–3), "I have been ignorant among people," meaning that I know this (evidence) from my own situation. I was ignorant of both the hidden and revealed sciences yesterday, but today I have become knowledgeable of all. Yet I have not learned from a teacher, nor from a book, and I have not done it by myself. This is something people have noticed and do not deny, for (I was) young in years and full of knowledge. Every philosopher and every learned person who had already read (the writings) of the sages, and who had already studied the hidden sciences such as the arrangement of the spheres, the qualities of gemstones, the plants, and the animals, and the rest of the refined sciences, came to me in order to listen to me and to learn from my speech. This is proof for me and for them that there is an acting (force) that is not created. It has already been put forth in the book of Kings, "God gave Solomon very great wisdom" (1 Kgs 5:9). It is also said about him, "He was wiser than anyone else.… He composed three thousand proverbs.… He would speak of trees.… People came from all the nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (1 Kgs 5:11–14 MT). It is (further) said about him, "All the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon" (2 Chr 9:23). He shows that they wanted to see him and hear his words because they were amazed at the stories they had heard about him. (Solomon) says: "That I see myself full of wisdom and knowledge after not knowing a thing, not learning from anyone, and not reading any scholar's book, is one of the proofs of the existence of the Lord."

The saying "*ve-daʿat qedoshim edaʿ*" (Yefet: I have known the knowledge of the distinguished natures) points to the knowledge of the Creator, who is "*elohim qedoshim*" (a holy God, Josh 24:19). He means by it additional knowledge, not (a result of) inference, as this could (potentially) include errors. After he presents proof for the existence of the Creator from his own condition, he, likewise, compares it to (the condition of) the rest of people and animals, upon whom the Lord bestowed wisdom, which they did not acquire through anyone else, as was explained earlier.

He then says, "Who ascended to the heavens and came down?" (v. 4). He mentions four things: heavens, wind, water, and earth. He asks, "Who has ascended the heavens and came down?" (v. 4)—not, "Who created the heavens?" Likewise, with regard to the wind (he asks a similar question): "Who gathered the wind?" About the water he asks, "Who collected

water in a garment?"—not, "Who created it"; for his purpose is twofold: first, he wants to respond to those who are engrossed in knowledge[16] not mentioned by Solomon, peace upon him. These are some of the scholars of the nations who disclose measurements and capacities which are wrong and unfounded. He asks, "Who has ascended the heavens and came back down to communicate the measurements of the spheres? Who lifted them up in order to say that the measurement of this sphere is such and such, and the distance between this sphere and the one above it is so and so," and so on? He asserts that the statements of such people are invalid, for the Lord did not impart this information to them. None of them ascended and measured the spheres to inform and teach people of their measurements and distances. Likewise, (he asks,) "Who gathered the wind in the palm of their hands to assess its capacity?" Similarly, (he asks) "Who collected water in a garment?" In like fashion, (he asks,) "Who established the ends of the earth and cast its foundations, who lifted it to know its depth, (who) informed people so they know the quantity and quality of the winds and the water, the heights of the sphere, and the depths of the earth?" (This is in accordance with) what the other prophet said, "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored," and so on (Jer 31:37). He asserts that this is not possible. He says that if no mortal ascended to the spheres and came down, nor gathered the wind, nor collected the waters, nor set the foundations or the directions of the earth—how can they know and profess (such information)?[17] He then says, "What is the person's name, and his son's name?"—meaning, that if there were one who professed doing so, his name should have been mentioned and well known. Who is the son of this person to whom he transmitted (this knowledge), (a son who would say,) "I have seen my father, or heard him say, 'I ascended to the heavens, gathered winds, collected the water, and established the earth'"? He says, "tell (us) if you know

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16. Significantly, the Arabic word denoting English "knowledge" and "science" is the same (*'ilm*). This is also etymologically true for the Latin root of the English word "science" (*scientia*).

17. Cf. the words attributed to R. Simeon b. Yoḥay (Gen. Rab. 6:8), who claims that no one knows or is able to find out how the luminaries travel when they are not seen in the sky: "R. Simeon b. Yoḥay said: we do not know whether they fly through the air, glide in the heaven, or travel in their usual manner. It is an exceedingly difficult matter, and no person can fathom it." See Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Soncino, 1983), 1:47.

(such a person)," by which he means that no one can say this or impart such information. Therefore, the statements of the one who claims that he knows the measurements of the sphere and the earth, the capacity of the wind, the waters, and the earth, are invalid, and he engrosses himself with what he does not know.

(The second purpose:) After he establishes the (existence) of the Creator, and nullifies the argument of those who say that they know the measurements of the world and (other) hidden things, which are only known to the one who created them, he mentions the Law (Arab. *al-šarīʿa*) for which the world was created. He says (v. 5), "All divine words are pure," meaning that there is neither a deceit nor a flaw in it. Likewise, the words of David, peace upon him, "This God—his way is perfect" (2 Sam 22:31 = Ps 18:31). He mentions the Law after he mentions monotheism (Arab. *al-tawḥīd*), because anyone who believes in monotheism must also accept the Law. Similarly, David says, "The heavens are telling the glory of God" (Ps 19:2), in order to mention the proof for the existence of the Creator; he then says, "The teaching of the Lord is perfect," and so on (Ps 19:8).

He then says, "He is like a shield to all who humble themselves before him." So, too, David says, "The word of the Lord is pure. He is a shield to all who take refuge in him" (2 Sam 22:31 = Ps 18:31). He means to say here that the Lord protects his followers and servants, who find refuge in him and depend upon him. He points by it to the day of judgment (*yom ha-din*), on which the Lord will punish the wicked and reward the righteous.

He then says, "Do not add to his exhortation" (v. 6), meaning, "Do not add to what he has written in his Law," for it entails "great and marvelous things" (Job 9:10) "(which are) beyond human (comprehension)" (Joel 1:12). This (prohibition) also includes "do not add to the commandments," as per "you must neither add anything to what I command you" (Deut 4:2). However, he omits (the prohibition to) subtract (from Scripture), yet it is said in the exalted Torah "nor take away anything from it" (Deut 4:2), for they add, as we mentioned before.

Thus he includes in this section the mention of monotheism (*al-tawḥīd*), the Law (*al-šarīʿa*), and the day of judgment, which encompasses reward and punishment. He says about the reward, "He is like a shield to all who humble themselves before him"; and about the punishment, "Lest he rebuke you and you be severed by his hand." Thus he shows that the Lord holds responsible the one who adds upon his words and who

makes assertions which he cannot support with evidence. Such a person will be proven wrong,[18] and after that punishment will follow, no doubt.

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18. See Joshua Blau*, A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 554, for the meanings of ינקטע and אלאנקטאע.

Zawanowska, Marzena. *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10–25:18).* Karaite Texts and Studies 4. Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 46. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Psalm 121 from Medieval Jewish Exegesis to Contemporary Israeli Culture: Some Reflections

Ora Brison

Introduction

During the last decades, reciting psalms has become a noticeably widespread phenomenon in contemporary Israel. This trend has a most significant presence in Israeli Jewish cultural life in both the private and the public spheres. The reciting of psalms is practiced by men and women, young and old, nonreligious and ultraorthodox, as part of their daily spiritual routine, regardless of the formal practice of Jewish prayer. An examination of this phenomenon indicates that the importance assigned to biblical psalms as personal prayers in modern Israel is, perhaps, much more similar to the medieval Karaite liturgical culture than to that of the Rabbanites. To demonstrate this "old-new" widespread cultural phenomenon of reciting psalms I have chosen Ps 121 ("I lift up my eyes to the hills"), one of the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–134), as a case study.[1] In this essay I will present a short comparison between the exegetical approaches of the medieval exegetes Saʿadia Gaon, Yefet ben ʿEli, and Salmon ben Yerūḥīm on the book of Psalms, focusing on Ps 121. I shall also propose a modern commentary on Ps 121, examining its prayer and cultural reception in various Jewish communities of contemporary Israel.

1. Unless otherwise noted, I quote from the NRSV.

Medieval Rabbanite and Karaite Exegesis of the Book of Psalms

To state the obvious: Sa'adia Gaon and the Karaite commentators, Salmon ben Yerūḥīm and Yefet ben 'Eli, differ in their exegetical approaches to the book of Psalms.[2]

Sa'adia's complex perception of the Psalms is expressed in his three introductions and commentaries to the book of Psalms.[3] Sa'adia equates Psalms' educative potential to that of the Torah.[4] However, he denies that Psalms has any literary uniqueness within the biblical canon. He does not agree with the talmudic statement that "David wrote the book of Psalms with ten elders" (b. B. Bat. 14b). According to Sa'adia, Psalms, the "Book of Praise" (*Kitāb al-tasābiḥ*), was a second Torah given by God to David and composed solely by him: "[The book of Psalms] was revealed to the best of kings, the prophet David, peace be upon him, the chosen [of God]."[5] While the sages regarded the Psalms as authentic prayers, he asserts that psalms as formal prayers were intended only for the Levites' prayer recitation during the time of the temple. He argues that, in the diaspora, the book functions as a theological-ethical book of direction and guidance. Sa'adia was opposed to the Karaite belief that the book was the prophetic mandatory prayer book (*diwan al-ṣala*) of the Jewish people throughout the generations. However, he recognizes Psalms' secondary role in the synagogue liturgy. This is likely why he does not oppose the inclusion of psalms in the prayer book, as long as it is understood that individual psalms were not prayers by themselves but additions to the actual mandatory prayers.[6]

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2. On Karaite tradition of Arabic Bible translations, see Meira Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation: A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. Meira Polliack, Handbuch der Orientalistik 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 389–410.

3. Yosef Kafiḥ, *Psalms with the Translation and Commentary of Saadiah Gaon* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: "Hathia" Publishing, 1966).

4. Moshe Sokolow, "Saadiah Gaon's Prolegomenon to Psalms," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 51 (1984): 131.

5. See Kafiḥ, *Psalms*, 27 (English translation here and elsewhere is mine); for the commentary section on this translation, see Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 5–6.

6. Simon, *Four Approaches*, 25–28.

Salmon ben Yerūḥīm compares the book of Psalms to the Torah, and he discusses the parallels between the two. In his polemic with Saʿadia Gaon he expresses the Karaite conception regarding the purpose of the Psalms. However, while both of them subscribe to the same literary model, Salmon's comparison focuses on the content; in that he differs from Saʿadia, who deals mainly with the rhetoric and style of the Psalms.

Unlike Saʿadia, Salmon considers the book of Psalms as unique within the biblical canon. For Salmon, Psalms is not only a book of directions and guidance, but it is designated to serve as the source for Jewish prayer in all times, for the generations prior to the building of the temple as well as for the exilic eras. For him, reciting psalms as prayers was not limited to Jerusalem or to any particular geographical area. His purpose was to show the important status of the psalms and their close relationship with the Torah and prophecy.[7] According to Salmon, although the book is named after King David, some psalms were composed by other prophets.[8] He argues that there is a thematic link between each psalm and the one preceding it, and that the psalms are prophecies and are therefore arranged in a certain order. In his introduction to the book, Salmon emphasizes the use of the imperative form in many verbs that express the various aspects of prayer—such as pleading, crying, begging, and appealing—as well as directives to thank the Lord, sing to him, exalt and glorify him, and more.[9] All these, for Salmon, were proof of the very nature of the Psalms: not only as prayers, but also as including within their text detailed instructions about their character and practice.

Yefet ben ʿEli also maintains that the book has a number of prophetic authors besides David, among them Moses (Ps 90), Solomon (72; 127), and others like Asaph (76; 82), Jeduthun (62; 77) and the Sons of Korah (85; 87). Moreover, in his commentary on Ps 1 he also acknowledges that the authorship of some psalms is unknown.[10] These prophetic authors

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7. Simon, *Four Approaches*, 61.

8. The Karaites made an effort to give meaning to the prophecies of redemption not only in the books of the Prophets. The Torah, the book of Psalms, Daniel, and the Song of Songs were also seen as prophecies for the future. See Yoram Erder, "The Attitude of the Karaite Yefet ben ʿEli to Islam in Light of His Interpretation of Psalms 14 and 53" [Hebrew], *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora* 14 (1997): 30–31.

9. Joseph Shunary, "Salmon ben Yeruham's Commentary on the Book of Psalms," *JQR* NS 73 (1982–1983): 159, 169–70.

10. Simon, *Four Approaches*, 76–79.

recorded the prayers as a book of instruction (for generations to come) on how to pray.[11] Yefet divides the psalms into twelve different categories, or "gates" (*abwab*), representing the different stages of biblical historiography.[12] He also classifies several thematic categories within the book such as songs of praise, petition, thanksgiving, and more.[13]

Yefet argues against Saʿadia's claim that Psalms constitutes a "book of edification," that the psalms are "closed" prophecies, and that the hymnal character of the book is simply an external rhetorical form. He maintains that Psalms is a prayer book in content, style, and form, and that the prophetic prayers are imposed upon the worshipers of all generations.[14]

Saʿadia, Salmon, Yefet, and other medieval Rabbanite and Karaite translators of the Bible from Hebrew to Arabic try to emulate the Hebrew source language, including content and context, as well as lexical and syntactic characteristics. However, their different approaches and perspectives are also expressed in their methods of translation and exegesis. In her work on the Karaite translations of the Pentateuch, Meira Polliack writes that a major difference between the Karaite Judeo-Arabic translations and that of Saʿadia's is demonstrated in the aspect of the use of alternative translations within the translated text.[15] Ilana Sasson adds: "Saadiah strives to present his audience with an independent final product and with a closed self-contained version."[16] This distinction is reflected also in their commentaries on the Psalms.

The Songs of Ascents

The Songs of Ascents collection includes fifteen psalms (120–134) that have the superscription *šîr hammaʿălôt*, "Song of Ascents," with the excep-

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11. Shunary, "Salmon ben Yeruham," 159.

12. Sokolow, "Saadiah Gaon's Prolegomenon," 137–49.

13. Ilana Sasson, "Psalms: Primary Translations: Arabic Translations," in *Writings*, vol. 1C of *The Hebrew Bible*, ed. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov, Textual History of the Bible (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 112.

14. Simon, *Four Approaches*, 75.

15. For a comprehensive comparison between these exegetes and their methods of translation see Polliack, *Karaite Tradition*, 242–77, esp. 268; Polliack, "Medieval Karaite Methods of Translating Biblical Narrative into Arabic," *VT* 45 (1998): 375–98.

16. Ilana Sasson, "The Book of Proverbs between Saadia and Yefet," *IHIW* 1 (2013): 167.

tion of Ps 121, which is entitled *šîr lammaʿălôt*.[17] These psalms are widely recognized as a subdivision within the book: not just because of their common superscriptions, but, mainly, because of the thematic, stylistic, and syntactic similarities they share and the parallel phrases that appear in them. According to Berhardus Eerdmans, the collection is a "suite" of songs to be read in succession.[18]

"Ascents" (*maʿălôt*, מעלות) is the plural form of the singular noun מעלה (*maʿălâ*): "step, stair" (from the root ʿ*lh*, עלה: "go up, ascend, climb").[19] The two most commonly accepted interpretations of the Songs of Ascents are either as "pilgrim songs," referring to traveling to Jerusalem for one of the three annual festivals (Deut 16:16; also Ezra 7:9 and Ps 24:3), or as referring to the exiles returning from Babylon as they ascended the mountains to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1; 7:7).[20] In the Mishnah (m. Sukkah 5:4; m. Mid. 2:5), the "ascents," מעלות (*maʿălôt*) are explained as the fifteen stairs of the temple upon which the Levites used to stand, ascend, sing, and play these psalms.[21] When comparing the works of Saʿadia and the Karaite

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17. The meaning of the superscription "Song of Ascents" is unclear, and the word "ascents" (*maʿalōt*) has several interpretations: temple stairs (as in Ezek 40:6, 49; 1 Chr 17:17); altar stairs (as in Exod 20:26; Ezra 43:17); Solomon's throne stairs (as in 2 Kgs 10:19–20; 2 Chr 9:18–19); the enthronement of Yehu (as in 2 Kgs 9:13) (BDB "מַעֲלָה," s.v.); in Neh 9:4 the *maʿălōt* are the stairs of the Levites. In the Septuagint and the Vulgate the collection is numbered as Ps 119–133.

The form of the superscription, "to or for Ascents" (למעלות, *lammaʿălôt*) in Ps 121 is a little different from that of the other psalms in the collection (*hammaʿălôt*, המעלות). In the Dead Sea Psalms Scroll, Ps 121 has the superscription *šîr hammaʿălôt*, the same as the other fourteen psalms of the collection. See James A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 38–39.

18. Loren D. Crow, *The Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120–134): Their Place in Israelite History and Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 16–17. See also Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 100; Bernardus D. Eerdmans, *The Hebrew Book of Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 1947), 548–71.

19. The singular noun מעלה is also interpreted as "good quality/virtue." See BDB "עָלָה," s.v. See also John Day, *Psalms* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 61–64.

20. Westermann (*The Psalms*, 100) points out that "in the western world the Songs of Ascents became the most important sources for travelers' songs."

21. Rashi, in his commentary to Ps 120, explains the title *hammaʿălôt* as referring to the fifteen steps that descend from the general court to that of the women's court. Rashi also finds in it an allusion to the heavenly stairs, intended for the righteous. The book of Psalms is highly significant for the Christian and the Islamic worlds. Fathers of the church, including Origen (ca. 185–253 CE) and Jerome (342–420 CE), interpreted

commentators, we see that Yefet and Salmon interpreted the Songs of Ascents as prayers recited by the Levites in the temple, whereas Saʿadia explains the term "ascents" as a musical term (ascending musical keys). His interpretation relies on the root ʿlh in 1 Sam 5:12 and Jer 14:2, there describing the raising of one's voice.[22] Saʿadia interprets both superscriptions (hammaʿălôt and lammaʿălôt) as being identical in meaning, and he considers them musical directives for playing or for singing Ps 1.[23]

Psalm 121

In the first part of Ps 121, the psalmist describes his distress and asks an indirect question, a rhetorical request for help, which he then answers with a statement of trust.[24] In the second part, another speaker tries to support the psalmist with depictions of God's power and greatness (vv. 3–4). The second speaker seeks to encourage and assure the psalmist of God's protection by continually repeating words with the root šmr qal (שמר, "keep, guard"). This root appears in the psalm six times, almost as part of an apotropaic formula, a mystic mantra: "he who keeps you" (v. 3); "he who keeps Israel" (v. 4); "the Lord is your keeper" (v. 5); "the Lord will keep you…; he will keep your life" (v. 7); "the Lord will keep your going" (v. 8).[25] In the third part of the psalm the psalmist turns back directly to God.

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the meaning of the Songs of Ascents in relation to spiritual steps/ascents taken by the believers. See Rowan A. Greer, "Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs," in Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works, trans. Rowan A. Greer, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1979), 239; The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume I (1–59 On the Psalms), trans. Marie Liguori Ewald, FC 48 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964). Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) interpreted these Psalms allegorically as portraying the soul's spiritual pilgrimage to God. See the translation by A. Cleveland Coxe in NPNF 1/8:589, 593. In the Qurʾan God gives the Psalms (known as zabūr) to David (Q Al-Nisaʾ 4:163; Al-Israʾ 17:55; Al-Anbiyaʾ 21:79; 105).

22. Kafiḥ, Psalms, 31; Simon, Four Approaches, 17.

23. Abraham ibn Ezra understood the change in the title of Ps 121 as designating a different melody from that of the other Songs of Ascents. See Simon, Four Approaches, 249.

24. See Julius Morgenstern, "Psalm 121," JBL 58 (1939): 311–23; Mitchell Dahood, S.J., Psalms III, 101–150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 199; Crow, The Songs, 38–43.

25. This could be a reference to Gen 28:15: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land."

When comparing the translations of this psalm by Saʿadia, Yefet, and Salmon, it is important to consider the different methodologies they use and the different purposes that their translations are meant to serve.[26]

Whereas Saʿadia's interpretation of Ps 121 is free of alternative translation suggestions or interbiblical textual references, Yefet's approach to the Psalms and to prophecy is characterized by allusions to other texts.[27] Yefet suggests that the speaker's voice here is a prophet's voice.[28] In his interpretation of verse 1, "I lift up my eyes to the hills," he identifies the "hills" as the mountains of Jerusalem, and he inserts a comment referring the reader to verses from Isaiah and Nahum. Yefet quotes the following verses:

> Isa 40:9 O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get you up to a high mountain O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

> Isa 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns.

> Nah 1:15 Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!

These innerbiblical allusions seem to reflect Yefet's view that some of the psalms also function as prophecies of the exile and of future redemption and and thus have relevance to the Karaites' eschatological-messianic aspirations.[29] Psalm 121 also reflects Yefet's assumption that the personal psalms

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26. All quotes are from one manuscript of Yefet's commentary on Ps 121, MS BNP Héb. 286–289, dated 1612–1614; and from one manuscript of Salmon ben Yerūḥīm, MS Firkovich 556 Héb, dated 1519.

27. See Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, 267–68. On Yefet's approach to prophecy in his translation and commentary, see Meira Polliack and Eliezer Schlossberg, *Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Book of Hosea* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), 10–70.

28. "Yefet's commentary on Psalm 137 exemplifies how far, in his view, the prophetic power of a Psalm can go," says Simon, *Four Approaches*, 110 n. 87.

29. On the messianic interpretations of Saʿadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yerūḥīm, and Yefet ben ʿEli of Isa 52:13–53:12, see Joseph Alobaidi, *The Messiah in Isaiah 53: The Commentaries of Saadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yeruham, and Yefet ben ʿEli on Is. 52:13–53:12*, La Bible dans l'histoire (Bern: Lang, 1998).

also have a national aspect and are meant to be used as future prayers for the whole exiled Jewish community. As articulated by Uriel Simon, for the Karaites,

> This is the force and authority of prophetic prayer. Its capacity to break through the mists of the future and match the needs and situation of a distant generation comes from its prophetic nature, while its eternal authority as obligatory prayer is entailed by its inclusion in Scripture.[30]

The multiple use of the verb *šmr qal* ("keep, guard") reminds the modern reader of the priestly blessing in Num 6:24–26: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace."

It is worth noting in this regard that Liebreich argues that the fifteen psalms in the Songs of Ascents collection were chosen for inclusion in the book in accordance with the fifteen words of the priestly blessing in Num 6:24–26. He notes that the four key phrases of the priestly blessing—[May the LORD] bless you; keep you; be gracious to you, and give you peace—occur throughout the Songs of Ascents (121:3–5, 7–8; 122:6–7, 15; 128:5), and those psalms are, in fact, commentaries on these priestly blessing expressions.[31]

Although this allusion to the priestly blessing might have been noticed by many rabbinic medieval commentators, they rarely mention it in their interpretations.[32] Neither does Saʿadia. Notably, he rarely includes Ps 121 in his prayer book (known as *Siddur Rasag*). In contrast with Saʿadia, Salmon, in his Arabic translation and commentary, inserts a comment referring to these verses, including the keywords and the relation to the thematic verb "keep, guard" in Ps 121, to the priestly blessing in Numbers.[33] This addition might have a didactic purpose, suggesting to the worshiper the

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30. Simon, *Four Approaches*, 97.

31. Leon J. Liebreich, "The Songs of Ascents and the Priestly Blessing," *JBL* 74 (1955): 33–36. Three of the psalms—124, 126, and 131—do not contain one of the key words. Liebreich suggests that the original collection had only twelve psalms and that these three were added to bring the number up to fifteen, to correspond with the number of words in the blessing. See Crow, *The Songs*, 20–21.

32. The Sifre to Numbers in the commentary (144) on Num 6:24, "keep you," quotes Ps 121. On the history of the priestly blessing, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 62–66.

33. The priestly blessing is celebrated today at the Western Wall during the

precise biblical background of this specific text.[34] This biblical intertextual reference also strengthens Salmon's argument about the status of the book as a prayer book. So also, interestingly, Liebreich, who suggests that the allusion expressed in some verses of Ps 121 to the priestly blessing contributes to its sacred status and its universal appeal.[35] And it is worth mentioning that in prayer books of different Jewish communities, Ps 121 is most frequently recited after the priestly blessing.

The main themes in this psalm are those that Yefet classifies as the main themes of the whole book. One is God's greatness as manifested in the creation and his control of the cosmos and of time (vv. 2, 6, 8). A second theme depicts God as the guardian and protector of Israel (v. 4) and all his believers, as expressed in the repetition of the verb "keep." The third theme is the message of faith—"My help comes from the LORD …" (v. 2)—followed by a blessing for the individual believer and the community: "The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore" (v. 6).

Meir Weiss asserts that the uniqueness of the book of Psalms is that, while many biblical books transmit theological and religious messages through human historiography with a view from God to man, Psalms expresses the relationship between God and man with a view from man to God.[36] This statement by Weiss beautifully sums up the Karaite belief and assertion that the psalms are prayers, both personal and communal.

The Songs of Ascents and Psalm 121 in the Jewish Prayer Books

Throughout Jewish history the texts of the Jewish prayer book, the Siddur, have had several traditional basic liturgical formulas. It includes many biblical verses as well as newly composed liturgical poems, added according to the different religious customs of different communities.

Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) and Pesach (Passover) holidays, with many thousands of participants.

34. On Yefet's didactic style see Meira Polliack, "The Medieval Karaite Tradition of Translating the Hebrew Bible into Arabic: Its Sources, Characteristics and Historical Background," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3/6.2 (1996): 191–92.

35. Liebreich, "The Songs of Ascents," 33–36.

36. Meir Weiss, *Ideas and Beliefs in the Book of Psalms* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2001), 14.

Psalms are an integral liturgical part of the Jewish prayer books and are included in prayer books of all the different Jewish communities around the world; they have a special and significant status and are recited daily.[37] Nowadays, Ps 121 is one of the most frequently recited psalms among the Songs of Ascents collection. It is read every weekday in the afternoon prayer, and is among the psalms recited before the *pesukei de-zimra* (a collection of verses of hymns and songs recited before the main prayers) in the morning prayers of Shabbat and Holy Days. In many communities it is customary to incorporate it also into the Sabbat afternoon and evening prayers. In some Ashkenazi communities it is recited only on the *Shabbat ha-gaddol*, the Saturday before Passover. According to Sephardic communities and several Hasidic communities, it is recited in the evening prayers of each weekday, before "We must praise," one of the Eighteen Blessings. In the Yemenite community, in the morning prayers, verses from Pss 19, 30, 33, 34, 47, 48, 90, 91, and 103 are read and sometimes followed by Pss 98, 121, 123, and others. In the Yemenite engagement blessings, 121:3–8 are recited among some other biblical verses followed by the priestly blessing. Verse 4, "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep," is part of the bedtime Shema.[38] Many recite this verse in the Traveler's Prayer (*Tefilat ha-derekh*), and in some communities it is recited in the Sanctification of [the new] Moon service (*Kiddush ha-levana*). Additionally, Ps 121 (at times, just some of its verses) is recited on religious liturgical occasions accompanying the Jewish individual from cradle to grave: it is recited during the Circumcision and First-Born Redemption (*pidyon ha-ben*) ceremonies, and often also in funerals and memorial services.[39]

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37. On the Songs of Ascents in the Jewish prayer book, see Naphtali Wieder, "The Fifteen 'Songs of the Ascents' and Psalm 119—The Division of their Reading for the Seven Days of the Week (in the Prayer Customs of the Karaites and in Rabbinic Judaism" [Hebrew], in *The Formation of Jewish Liturgy in the East and in the West*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1998), 352–57.

38. Verse 4 appears in many fragments of prayer books in the Shema prayer in Judeo-Arabic found in the Cairo Genizah. They suggest that this verse is probably the source of inspiration for the signature of the prayer in which the Lord is called, "He will keep his people keep Israel forever," which is attributed to the Geonim period in Babylon. See Shimon Fogel and Uri Ehrlich, "On the History of the Ancient Version of the 'Ha'shkivenu' Blessing" [Hebrew], *Tarbitz* 84.1–2 (2016): 78–94.

39. See also Sung-Soo Kim, "Reading the Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120–134) in Context" (PhD diss., Luther Seminary, 2003), 95.

Sa'adia Gaon's Prayer Book (*Siddur Rasag*)

One of the earliest codifications of the Jewish prayer book was drawn up by Sa'adia Gaon. His prayer book was composed in an attempt to present a uniform version of a prayer book that would be a compromise between the various versions of prayers and customs in the Jewish communities in the Middle East (Egypt, Palestine, and Babylon). It includes a translation into Arabic and a commentary, and it also contains liturgical poetry composed by Sa'adia himself and by others. He explains that the purpose of his prayer book is "for learning and understanding" and that, from the outset, it is not intended to be used for prayer but to teach the rules and customs of the prayers. He himself did not call his work by the well-known Hebrew name Siddur, but rather "a composition" of mandatory prayers and of blessings (*Kitāb jāmiʿ al-ṣalawāt wal-tasābiḥ*). It should be noted that he added some psalms to his prayer book as additions to the mandatory prayers and that the prayer instructions (rubrics) are also in Judeo-Arabic.

However, although popular during the Middle Ages, his prayer book has rarely been in use for the last five hundred years.

The Reception of the Songs of Ascents and Psalm 121 in the Karaite Prayer Book

The early Karaites insisted that formal prayer should mainly consist of recitations from the Psalms and quotations from other biblical books. However, similar to what happened with the rabbinic prayer book, a process of inserting some personal prayers composed by "wise and understanding" individuals into the Karaites' prayer book continued throughout the generations.

The early Karaites avoided rabbinic liturgical and poetic works, and they insisted that formal prayer should consist exclusively of recitations from the Psalms and quotations from other biblical books. However, some individuals, if they were "wise and understanding," were permitted to insert their personal prayers into the liturgy. This led to Karaite experimentation with poetic works patterned after rabbinic models, and by the thirteenth century CE the Karaite prayer book compiled by Aaron ben Joseph included numerous traditional-typed *piyyutim* written mostly by Karaites and some by Rabbanites as well.[40] The proto-Karaite author,

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40. Leon J. Weinberger, "A Note on Karaite Adaptations of Rabbinic Prayers," *JQR*

Anan ben David, whom the Karaites consider as founder of their move-
ment, assigned a special place in his prayer book for the Songs of Ascents,
together with other psalms. Since we have only a few passages from Anan's
prayer book, it seems that his intention was to divide the Songs of Ascents
(together with Ps 119) so that two hymns will be recited on each week-
day and three on the Shabbat. This custom was practiced by the Karaites
who lived in Jerusalem, who recited psalms in this manner not only in the
morning prayers, but also in the evening prayers. On Yom Kippur all the
Songs of Ascents were read, as well as near the end of the Sabbath on the
seven Sabbath days between Pesach (Passover) and Shavu'ot (Pentecost).

Interestingly, the combined recitation of the Songs of Ascents together
with Ps 119, and their distribution throughout the week's daily prayers,
was adopted in rabbinic circles. This practice was also found in later peri-
ods and in different geographic regions, but with a change: it was removed
from the synagogue, transferred to the private home, and attached to the
bedtime Shema prayer. A trace of this custom is preserved in the Sephardi-
style prayer book. In the *pesukei de-zimra*, four Songs of Ascents were
included, Pss 121–124. This is apparently one of the Karaite traditional
prayer customs, preserved to this day.[41]

Tentative Conclusions

Regardless of the specific biblical and historical cultic/liturgical back-
ground and the *original* context of the psalms, their comforting, hopeful
messages are suitable for reading and praying at different events and in
various circumstances, joyful and optimistic as well as frightening and dis-
tressful—then and now.

Psalm 121 is a good example of this phenomenon. It is an important
example, not only of the different translation and interpretive approaches
of medieval Jewish commentators, but also of their viewpoints and ideolo-
gies concerning the book of Psalms in Jewish liturgy.

NS 74 (1984): 267. See also Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology* (New Haven: Yale Univer-
sity Press, 1952), 273–74. Yet see the recent article by Riikka Tuori, " 'More Didactic
than Lyrical': Modern Views on Karaite Hebrew Poetry," *Studia Orientalia* 111 (2011):
343–64, who argues against the idea of adaptation.

41. For Karaite and Rabbanite sources on the subject, see Wieder, "The Fifteen
'Songs of the Ascents,' " 352–56.

Sa'adia Gaon's exegetical approach to the Psalms, as being suitable for prayer mainly at the times of the temple, is well demonstrated by his commentary on Ps 121. Yefet ben 'Eli and Salmon ben Yerūḥīm present the Karaite tradition of literal interpretation, on the one hand, and the Karaite belief that Psalms is actually a prayer book, on the other. The exegesis by Karaites, enlisting the priestly blessing and the "redemptive voice on the hills," demonstrates their belief that some of the psalms are prophecies of past/present exile and of future salvation. Their perception and approach to the Psalms is that the book is an important part of the Jewish biblical canon and includes forms of prayer that embody eschatological and mystic elements for the individual believer as well as for the community.

Research shows that the acceptance of the book of Psalms (and Ps 121 in particular) into Jewish liturgy during the decades since the Karaite/Rabbanite polemics took place indicates that the Karaite approach had greater impact than usually imagined. I found that, in almost all the Jewish communities around the world, the Karaite liturgical recitation of psalms was in fact accepted and became dominant in the wider Jewish-rabbinic prayers, even if not in the rabbinic prayer book.

I would carefully add that, from what I have learned, it would seem that the Karaite approach to the Psalms is the one that dominates the personal and public spheres in contemporary Israel. This is perhaps both surprising and unsurprising, when one thinks of Jewish history, on the one hand, and personal prayer and nonliturgical devotion, on the other hand.

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On the Advantages of Studying the Book of Job
as Outlined in Yefet ben ʿEli's Commentary

Arik Sadan

The Text

This is a translation of the second part of Yefet ben ʿEli's introduction to his commentary on the book of Job, followed by a short discussion. The translation is my own work, from my book on Yefet's commentary.[1] The translation is based on the following manuscripts: BL Or. 2510 (IMHM 6284); JTS MS 3354, ENA 100 (IMHM 32039); SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:247 (IMHM 53850); SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:248 (IMHM 54035); and SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:304 (IMHM 53876).[2]

Translation

And when I introduced what is incumbent to introduce in the matter of this great man [that is, Job], may peace be upon him, I consider it right to gather the main issues of this book and its benefits before I begin its commentary, in order that the learner would be aware of its benefits and wish to teach and obtain them. And from the giver of wisdom [that is, God] I ask to guide me in the right path toward the true success, and from him I seek aid.

The first [issue] that we learn from this book is that there had been a group of believers in the unity of God[3] and people of knowledge not from

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1. Arik Sadan, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Book of Job*, Karaite Texts and Studies 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

2. Clarifications and additions within the translation are in square brackets; references to biblical verses are in round brackets.

3. This is the translation of מוחדין, a word that also occurs later (n. 5 below).

our nation, because Job and his friends were not of the antecedents of Jacob. And he taught us that those who believe in the unity of God and the believers have always been in the world, but they are not many among the nations of the world. Neither a nation nor most of it were believers except for our nation.

The second is his instructing us that the believers have always joined one another, as we will explain in what follows: each one of Job's friends was of a [different] city and [a different] family, as he said: "each of them set out from his home" (Job 2:11).[4] And he makes us desire to join and to become near one another, as faith makes incumbent.

The third is that the believers had places in which they gathered on a certain day in order to worship [God] and to discuss the religion of God, as we will explain in [the matter of] "one day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord" (Job 1:6). And he encourages us to be like them, especially on Saturdays and at the beginning of months and feasts.

The fourth is what we learn from the story of the Satan: that there was in the past someone who wandered in the land, called the people to the religion, and watched [them] on behalf of God Almighty; and that no one was neglected in the world without a caller [to his religion] or watcher [for God]. As it was said about the ancient generations, "At that time people began to invoke the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). And he informed of the reasons for the destruction of our nation when it lacked it (that is, who invites the people to God), as he said, "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares" (Jer 5:1); and he destroyed the land and most of them died by his "four deadly acts of judgment" (Ezek 14:21).

The fifth is what he instructed us of the religion of Job, his being pious and his good deeds, in order that we follow his path and footsteps and act like him, even though he is not of our nation.

The sixth is his [Job's] holding on to his religion and his endurance at the trial that befell him, which had not happened to any of the righteous but him. And in that there is a lesson for us to hold on to the religion of God despite the conditions of the diaspora and the magnitude of our

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According to another version that appears in several manuscripts, מזהירין ("warners"), Yefet here refers to the Karaites, as this is one of the names by which they referred to themselves.

4. The translation of this biblical verse, as of all others, is that of the NRSV.

disasters; as he said, "All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant" (Ps 44:18). However, the calamities of Job did not injure him because of sins, whereas our disasters are due to weighty sins; and it is therefore more appropriate for us to endure the disasters that injure us.

The seventh is the return of God to him [Job] and removing his anger, which he described to us, since his fortune returned to him doubled, his body recovered from the disease, and he surpasses the people of his time in power and rank. And we also hope for a relief, the removal of disasters away from us and our return to what is better than [our situation] in ancient times. Job was sure that God would return to him, even if he [that is, God] did not notify him of that. It is therefore more appropriate that we be confident of all God's promises, which every prophet mentioned, especially [those mentioned] with pacts and treaties, and then we would find comfort in them and endure the conditions of the bitter diaspora.

The eighth is that everyone was slandering Job's way and compared it to every abhorrent thing, such as what happens to us especially from Ishmael; and he [Job] endured that until God revealed his proof and it was obvious for the people that it is the right way, as God said to Elifaz, "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

The ninth is that he taught us the way of his [Job's] friends and their way of speech [that is, their way of argumentation, their methodology in speech] in order that we would know what they were thinking before God revealed to them the truth, in order that we would know that the disagreement was among the ancient ones, although they believed in the unity of God[5] and believers, and that God made them be in need of deepening in the discussion; sometimes they go into it [that is, discussion] in the right way; sometimes they reach the truth, and sometimes not. And in it there is a response to the way of whoever considers the tradition right and rejects the discussion, because he can be wrong or right, and that is the way of the traditionalism like al-Fayyūmī [Saʻadia Gaon] and those who follow him and the traditionalism of every nation.

The tenth is that we learn from them [the friends] the good ways of study and discussion, because each [of them] waited patiently for his friend to finish his words and stop [talking], and kept in his heart all that

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5. This is the translation of מוחדין, a word that also appeared before, according to several manuscripts (see n. 3 above).

he would say, and then spoke in his turn and responded to the words of
his friend in what he considered as the [right] belief. We, too, will do like
them in our discussion; and whoever deviates from this way is one of little
knowledge, no manners and condemned.

The eleventh is that speech ensued from them three times, although
Job was confident of the truth of his way and they were confident of the
truth of their way. Neither he conceded to them nor they conceded to him,
and then they stopped talking to him. This shows that people of study can
differ in their view, without one of them conceding to his friend, and there
is no doubt that the truth is with one of them. In the end the truth will
appear from God, as he said on the Remainder:[6] "he who vindicates me
is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my
adversaries? Let them confront me" (Isa 50:8).

The twelfth is that in this book there is a mention of God's braveries
and his wonders. Eliphaz mentioned some of them, Job and Elihu elabo-
rated, and God said more than all. We therefore know from them [from all
the dialogues] many of God's wonders.

The thirteenth is that God Almighty constructed the story of Job for
us in order that it would be for the generations to come, so that he would
be remembered for the good and not forgotten among the scholars and the
righteous. And such are the stories of the righteous and learned,[7] as it was
said, "Let this be recorded for a generation to come" (Ps 102:19).

And these matters that I mentioned—we learn them from this book
besides what we learn from many things that were said in their [the
friends'] discussions. The benefits of this book thus became clear, and it is
incumbent upon the people to desire to realize the knowledge in it. Hereby
I begin to interpret verse by verse, and to mention its matters according to
what we heard and what seems appropriate to us. I will mention in all of
them which way is closer [to the truth], since many scholars directed the
words of Job not toward their goal and aim; and Job was then condemned
in some way. God Almighty testified for him at the beginning of his book
that he is "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away
from evil" (Job 1:1); and at the end of his book, he said, "for you have not
spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7). By these texts

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6. This is the translation of שארית, a term that the Karaites used to refer to them-
selves. See also the next note.

7. This is the translation of משכילים, a term that the Karaites used to refer to them-
selves. See also the previous note.

it is obligatory that we make this a principle, and point all the words of Job on a way which corresponds to this principle. We will also interpret every verse whose interpretation is difficult in its place, God willing in his grace and honor.

Short Discussion

Yefet ben 'Eli's translation of and commentary on the book of Job contains an introduction, which can be divided into two parts. Whereas the first part discusses the various creations of God and their divisions and connects them to the book of Job, the text of the second part, brought here in its English translation, details the thirteen advantages that make it worthwhile to study the book well.

Yefet begins the list of these advantages with the general perspective of the book, and he emphasizes that Job was a righteous man who was not a member of the sons of Israel's community. Despite that, as Yefet claims and shows, the sons of Israel should learn from Job and his ways. Job is a role model for any believer, Jew or non-Jew, and therefore his story and the issues it raises ought to be studied. Yefet then moves on to the more specific advantages of the book and its dialogical nature, from which one should learn the importance of discussions and conversations, as well as the importance of performing them in a civilized manner, such as showing respect to people of various opinions even when they greatly differ from one's own opinion. Yefet uses some of the advantages he discusses in order to show that the way of the Karaites is the right way, since they aim at seriously discussing matters rather than just accepting them. In the ninth advantage Yefet even explicitly mentions al-Fayyūmī (Sa'adia Gaon) and those who follow him as an example for those who oppose discussions and thus should be condemned.

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Salmon ben Yerūḥīm on Lamentations 1:12

Jessica Andruss

Salmon ben Yerūḥīm was a leading Bible scholar among the Jerusalem Karaites. In the middle of the tenth century CE, he authored Arabic commentaries on at least six biblical books—Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes), Esther, and Ruth—and composed a now-lost linguistic treatise in Arabic about the "interchangeable letters" of biblical Hebrew (*Kitāb al-Ibdāl*, *Book of Substitution*). Salmon's exegetical method is informed by his Karaite sensibilities: he translates Hebrew verses into Arabic, begins his comments with linguistic observations, justifies his interpretations with parallel biblical passages, and writes his excursuses in a homiletical style in which he chastises and consoles, exhorting readers to greater piety and penitence.

The passage below comes from Salmon's commentary on Lamentations.[1] This biblical book was central to the liturgy and communal identity of the Jerusalem Karaites. It describes the anguish experienced by the people of Jerusalem when the city fell to the Babylonians in 586 BCE and most of the population was sent into exile. The themes of Lamentations—sin and punishment, exile and loss—resonated with the spiritual and social concerns of Salmon's community, who referred to themselves as "mourners for Zion" to emphasize their return to the holy city and their program of grieving over its ruins and the sins that had caused its downfall.

The homiletical thrust of Salmon's commentary reflects his understanding of Lamentations. Like most traditional Jewish interpreters,

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1. Salmon's text can be found in Mohammed Abdul-Latif Abdul-Karim, "Commentary of Salmon Ben Yeruham on Lamentations" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1976), 48–49. The NRSV translation of the Hebrew text of Lam 1:12 is reproduced in italics, followed by Salmon's translation of the verse into Arabic and then his commentary.

Salmon identifies the prophet Jeremiah as the book's author. Yet for Salmon, Lamentations is not merely Jeremiah's poetic lament for the fallen city. It is, rather, the prophet's "instruction for Israel," a guidebook that teaches Jews to recognize and repent for their sins during times of exile. The book's cries of woe and images of devastation are intended to rouse the exiles to a sincere and radical repentance that will ultimately lead to redemption. Within the commentary, Salmon amplifies the homiletical message that he ascribes to Jeremiah with his own homilies that draw on Karaite rhetoric, rabbinic models, and oratorical techniques from the Arabic-Islamic sphere. Further, to each chapter of Lamentations Salmon assigns a biblical verse that justifies Israel's suffering as punishment for the people's sins, and he uses this verse as a refrain at the end of his comment on each verse of Lamentations.

Salmon's homiletical hermeneutic is apparent in his comment on Lam 1:12, cited below. The biblical verse demands,

> *Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow* (NRSV),

which Salmon expands with a short, self-contained homily that leaves no doubt about what Israel has lost:

> There is no community in the world [to whom] God communicated or to whom he revealed prophets except for Israel! Or for whom he revealed divine glory and celestial fire and signs and wonders, except for Israel!

These exclamations—which may be borrowed from an actual Karaite sermon—intensify the emotional force of the biblical passage by forging an implicit contrast between Israel's ancestral glory and the degraded conditions of exile.

This homily—as well as Salmon's approach to Lamentations more generally—is rooted in comparison, and Salmon uses Lam 1:12 as a prooftext to justify his comparative hermeneutic. For Salmon, Jeremiah's command to "look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow" is not a rhetorical plea but an exegetical imperative for readers of Scripture. Salmon himself practices this comparative method throughout the commentary. In the introduction to his commentary, he systematically compares the sufferings of Israel and the sufferings of Job, concluding that the former far outweigh the latter and declaring unequivocally that:

There is no calamity that is greater than our calamity, and no pain that is greater than our pain.

He reaffirms this assessment in his comment to Lam 1:12 with the addition of verses from Daniel and Ezekiel that note the singularity of Jerusalem's punishment.

At this point, however, Salmon's comparative inquiry takes an unexpected turn. He compares the punishments of Israel with those of Egypt and Canaan and, whereas the previous comparisons highlight the severity of Israel's suffering, this comparison reveals instead the exceptional degree of divine mercy toward Israel. For while the enemies of Israel were completely annihilated—so argues Salmon—the Israelites were merely sent into exile. God did not "make a full end" (Heb. *kālāh*; Jer 30:11) of Israel, as God did with the other nations.

Salmon makes the case for this interpretation on the basis of two lines of reasoning, both drawing on Isa 27:7–8. This biblical passage juxtaposes the punishments of Israel and Israel's enemies, concluding with the assertion that,

By measure [בסאסאה, *bəsaʾssəʾâ*], by expulsion [בשלחה, *bəšalḥāh*], you did contend with them.

Salmon first addresses the passage from a linguistic point of view, defining the *hapax legomenon bəsaʾssəʾâ* as "to a certain extent," which he interprets in apposition to expulsion (*bəšalḥāh*). Thus, exile is a restrained, measured punishment, in contradistinction to the full, horrific effects of unbridled divine wrath that afflicted Israel's enemies.

To this explanation, Salmon appends a figurative interpretation of the verse inspired by paranomasia, a typically midrashic technique. Here he presents the expulsion (*šalḥāh*) as an allusion to the branches (*šəlūḥôt*) of a tree. Just as the destruction of a tree's branches is far less severe than the fatal destruction of a tree's roots, so the punishment of exile that Israel endures is far gentler than the punishment of complete annihilation which brought the peoples of Egypt and Canaan to a violent end.

Salmon's exegesis of Isa 27:7–8 constitutes a "commentary within a commentary" that enables him to read Lam 1:12 against the grain, and, indeed, in contrast to the interpretation that he initially advocates. In Salmon's double-reading, exile signifies both the unprecedented severity of God's punishment and the unequaled mercy of God's protection. The

complexity of this message accords well with Salmon's homiletical goals. Exile—so familiar to the lived experience of Salmon's readership—proves that Israel has sinned and also promises that Israel will be redeemed. In Salmon's homiletical interpretation, the suffering to which Jeremiah refers is nothing less than exile, which continues to punish and preserve the Jewish community in his own time, and which persuades perceptive readers of the Bible of the need to repent.

Translation—Salmon on Lamentations 1:12

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

"Is it nothing to you?" I call[2] to all you who pass by. "Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger."

I translated *lô' ʿalêkem*[3] as "Is it nothing to you?" because often for us *lô'* (the negative) has the meaning of *ha-lô'* (the negative interrogative), as in "before their eyes, will they not [*lô'*] stone us?" (Exod 8:26); and similarly, "for now the slaughter among the Philistines—was it not [*lô'*] great?" (1 Sam 14:30). The meanings of *ha-lô'* are many. They have also translated *lô' ʿalêkem* to mean, "Heaven forbid that what befell me should befall you!"[4] However, the first rendering is more proper and more plausible.

He [Jeremiah] says, "Is it nothing to you? I call to all who pass by the road: Reflect on my condition, and see! Did you witness what happened to me—the sorrow and the magnitude of the calamities that happened to me and to my life?"

There is no community in the world [to whom] God communicated or for whom he revealed prophets except for Israel! Or for whom he revealed divine glory and celestial fire and signs and wonders, except for Israel!

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2. Salmon has added the verb "I call" in his Arabic translation.

3. Hebrew: לוא אליכם.

4. This reading is advanced by the rabbis; see, e.g., the paraphrase offered in Lamentations Rabbah: "The Community of Israel says to the nations of the world: 'May there not come upon you what has come upon me!'" (see A. Cohen, trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Lamentations*, 3rd ed. [London: Soncino, 1983], 117).

For this reason, he says, "if there is any sorrow like my sorrow," just as I explained in the introduction to this book, regarding the calamities that troubled the tried one—that is Job, peace be upon him. The calamities of Israel are far greater, as I have explained. Daniel said, "by bringing upon us a great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done the like of what has been done against Jerusalem" (Dan 9:12). And God said through Ezekiel, "I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again" (Ezek 5:9).

"Which was brought upon me" means "that which was done to me" and this is like the verse, "with whom have you dealt thus?" (Lam 2:20).

"Which the Lord inflicted" means that he expelled Israel from their country and their temple, as it is said, "I will drive them out of my house" (Hos 9:15); and likewise as it is said, "He removed them with his fierce blast in the day of the east wind" (Isa 27:8). Its meaning is [expressed] in the beginning of the verse, "Has he smitten them as he smote those who smote them?" (Isa 27:7a). This [verse indicates] God's benevolence to this community, since he spared it and did not destroy it on account of the evilness of its deeds, as I have explained in the introduction to this book. He said, "See my grace: is the smiting of the one who smote him like the smiting of the Lord of the worlds?" The smiter alluded to in this verse is Pharaoh and his people; when they exceeded all bounds, God destroyed them completely.

"Or have they been slain as their slayers were slain?" (Isa 27:7b)—"or have they been killed as their killers were killed?" This means the Canaanites. God commanded that they be killed, and Israel killed them. Was Israel in its entirety killed, like them? That is to say, the way that God destroyed Israel was not like the destruction of Pharaoh and his people, and it was not like [the destruction of] the Canaanites, as he says, "The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end" (Jer 4:27). In what follows, he also says, "I will make a full end of all the nations" (Jer 30:11).

Then it is said, "By measure [bəsaʾssəʾâ], by expulsion [bəšalḥāh], you did contend with them" (Isa 27:8). This means that their destruction only resembled the destruction of their enemies to a certain extent, because the expression bəsaʾssəʾa means "by the measure," as in "for every measure [səʾôn]" (Isa 9:4/5) and "a measure [səʾâ] of fine meal" (2 Kgs 7:18). The meaning of "by the measure" is, in other words, "to a certain extent." It is not in the root because "by expulsion [bəšalḥāh]" is like, "Its shoots [šəlūḥôtehā] spread about and passed over the sea" (Isa 16:8). "By expulsion you did contend with them" (Isa 27:8) is a statement about its branches; he means to compare Israel to a tree. He says that the destruction that

happened to them was in their branches and not in their root, because expulsion [bəšalḥāh] is like "its shoots [šəlūḥôtehā] spread abroad" (Isa 16:8). He says of its branches that he disputes with them, which is to say, he punishes them.

"He removed them with his fierce blast in the day of the east wind" (Isa 27:8) means that in his mercy he did not destroy them completely; rather, a large gathering of them remained. He drove them out into the exile by the hand of the enemy, which is compared to an east wind, as it is said, "the east wind, the wind of the Lord, shall come" (Hos 13:15).

"On the day of his fierce anger." Because the exile was the day of the Lord's anger—as he had established through Moses, peace be upon him, when he said, "then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Deut 31:17)—all of this overtook them when they increased their rebellions, as it is said, "who is the man so wise that he can understand this? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through? And the Lord says: 'Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accord with it'" (Jer 9:12–13).

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Salmon ben Yerūḥīm on Qoheleth:
A Selection (Preface; 1:1–4; 4:17; 7:16; 12:12)

James T. Robinson

Salmon ben Yerūḥīm is the earliest of the Jerusalem Karaites to leave us a substantial corpus of commentaries written in Arabic. The commentary on Qoheleth was completed in the 950s CE. Typical of the Jerusalem tradition, it begins with a systematic introduction, in which Salmon singles out the five main themes of Qoheleth. A very full commentary follows, in which Salmon discusses each verse at great length, providing a complete Arabic translation with detailed exposition. Although Salmon is very eager to get at the proper linguistic sense of every word in context, what truly motivates him are the historical context, setting Qoheleth's teaching properly within the life of Solomon, and philosophy, bringing out the sober otherworldly ascetic teachings he finds Qoheleth to be teaching in this book of wisdom. This gives Salmon's commentary a strongly homiletical character, sometimes even poetic, in its call to the reader to follow the lessons taught by Solomon.

The samples given below provide illustrations of Salmon's homiletical method. The commentary on the first verses works hard to establish the wisdom credentials of Solomon and all the knowledge the book points toward. Here as elsewhere, Salmon's Qoheleth is constantly pushing the reader away from this world and toward the other, to a life of prayer, learning, and contemplation of the divine. The commentary on Qoh 4:17 shows Salmon's creative exegetical faculties serving his homiletical ideals, as he reads *regel* (Heb., lit. "foot") euphemistically in relation to the male pudendum, thus understanding the verse as a whole as warning against sexual impropriety. The commentaries on Qoh 7:16 and 12:12 establish the foundations for a polemic against "foreign wisdom," which will become typical of the Jerusalem Karaite school in general.

Salmon's commentary was edited with Hebrew translation in Moshe
Riese's unpublished doctoral dissertation.[1] Selections were published with
French translation by Georges Vajda.[2] Most recently, I published the com-
plete text with an annotated English translation and introduction.[3] The
following translations are based on my edition and translation.

In this essay, beyond Salmon's preface to his commentary (only in
an English translation of the original Judeo-Arabic), the selected bibli-
cal verses are presented, in most cases and without extra markings, in the
English rendering of the JPS (1985) translation, slightly modified at places
(in italics); at times, when the NRSV is more precise or bears a greater
similarity to Salmon's rendering, it is reproduced instead (and marked
as such). The next step is an English rendering of Salmon's translation of
the relevant verses (in boldface) and, finally, his commentary on them.
Hebrew and Arabic words will be given in transliteration, and additional
matters in parentheses.

Salmon's Preface

> In the name of YHWH the eternal God (Gen 21:33), let his name
> and his memory be exalted.

Let Allah the Deity of Israel be blessed, let his memory be exalted: the
One; the Primordial, Eternal, Everlasting Truth; the Everlasting, All-Pow-
erful, Creating Truth. In all he created he has no equal [Arab. *nidd*]; in
all his kingdom he has no contrary [Arab. *ḍidd*]; nor has he partner or
opponent. Let him be praised, as is worthy him and as he justly deserves,
for ever and ever.

The commentator, his memory for a blessing, said: The learned ought
to know that the meanings of Qoheleth, peace be with him, are according
to their external sense [Arab. *ẓāhir*] and are not proverbs [Arab. *amthāl*],
for Sulaymān [Solomon] the sage, peace be with him, had already collected

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1. Moshe Riese, "The Arabic Commentary of Solomon ben Yeruham the Karaite
on Ecclesiastes," PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1973.

2. Georges Vajda, *Deux commentaires karaïtes sur l'Ecclésiaste* (Leiden: Brill,
1971).

3. James T. Robinson, *Asceticism, Eschatology, Opposition to Philosophy: The
Arabic Translation and Commentary of Salmon ben Yeroham on Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)*,
Karaite Texts and Studies 5, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 45 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

proverbs in the book of Proverbs, on account of which he opened with its very first word saying: "The proverbs of Solomon son of David" (Prov 1:1). Yet when he decided he would write this noble book [Qoheleth] he opened with its very first word saying: "The words of Qoheleth" (Qoh 1:1), intending thereby to explain that it ought to be understood according to its external sense. He likewise said: "The words of Agur son of Jakeh" (Prov 30:1), and "The words of Lemuel" (Prov 31:1)—according to what we explained in the preface to Proverbs.

The reason I begin this way is because I have learned of people who interpreted the book improperly, saying, for example, that with the verse: "the sun rises and the sun goes down" (Qoh 1:5), he refers to the kingdom's appearance and disappearance, as it is said: "her sun went down while it was yet day; she has been shamed and disgraced" (Jer 15:9). They likewise explained: "in the day when the guards of the house tremble" (Qoh 12:3) with reference to *bet ha-Miqdash* [the (Jerusalem) temple], with the guards [Heb. *shomrim*] as priests and Levites [Heb. *kohanim u-leviyim*]. The book as a whole [they understood] in this same way. The one who first introduced these meanings was Benjamin al-Nahāwandī, may Allah have mercy on him. Yet the intention is not at all what Benjamin and others besides him thought, for in contrast to what Solomon, peace be with him, intended in this book has five foundations [Arab. *khamsa uṣūl*]—his book and his discourse are built upon them. It is them that he points to with all his intentions.

The first is to make known to the students that all things of this world are "dust" and that man was not created to perdure in it. He bases this proof on empirical evidence, as he says: "A generation goes, and a generation comes" (Qoh 1:4). The second is his describing to the people of the world the many slaves he acquired and great wealth he amassed and the great size and number of his houses and his various plants, gardens, orchards, pools of water, many cattle, and peculiar treasures of kings (see Qoh 2:4–8)—that all of this passes away and disappears and does not persist. He arouses them to the fact that they ought not to suppose they can attain what he attained, and because of this they should not desire this world; rather should they renounce it, for true shelter is in the Abode of Perdurance. The third is the difference between wisdom and ignorance. He exhorts the people to acquire wisdom and remove themselves from ignorance, as he says: "Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness" (Qoh 2:13). The fourth is the final aim, searching after one's deeds, as Allah commanded over the created beings: this consists of fearing Allah and keeping

his commandments, as he says: "Fear god" (Qoh 12:13). The fifth is to make known to those who serve [him] that Allah has an abode other than this world in which he rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked, as he says: "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked" (Qoh 3:17). This being so, it is required to renounce this world and abandon it and despise its lower corporeal matters, as man must suppress his bestial desire for it and despise any excess derived from it. He ought to take of it only what is required, what he cannot do without, such that he can reach obedience to his Lord as is incumbent upon him, as he says: "There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil" (Qoh 2:24).

Now that I have introduced in general the sage's intentions in this book, I begin to explain its words and summarize its meanings. From Allah I ask assistance in leading us to this [goal] by his grace and favor and generosity and with his abundant kindness and beneficence.

<center>Qoheleth 1:1–4</center>

1. *The words of Qoheleth son of David, king in Jerusalem.*

The words of Qoheleth, son of Dāwūd, <u>the</u> king in Jerusalem.

We have already made known, in what we wrote as preface, the meaning of "words," and that what the sage aims to teach with this term is that this book is [written] according to its external sense. As for his saying "Qoheleth"—it alludes to Solomon, as he says: "Qoheleth son of David." And Qoheleth is derived from *qehillah* [community].

Solomon has five names, all of them possessing in their derivation noble significations. The name *Shelomo* (Solomon) is derived from *shalom*, as it is said: "Solomon will be his name and I shall confer peace and quiet on Israel in his time" (1 Chr 22:9). *Yedidya* (2 Sam 12:25) is derived from *yedidut* (Heb., "friendship"), with the sense: "friend of the Eternal." These two names were given him by Allah. As for Agur (Prov 30:1), it is derived from ʾagra (Prov 6:8), ʾoger (Prov 10:5) [from the Hebrew root ʾa-g-r, "collect"], meaning that he has wisdom collected in him. *Lemuel* (Prov 31:1) is derived from [the Hebrew root] *m-w-l*, that is, he in his wisdom was equal to all the people of the world or even superior to them, as it is said: "he was the wisest of all men" (1 Kgs 5:11), and: "Solomon's wisdom greater ..." (1 Kgs 5:10). As for *Qoheleth*, it is derived

from *q-h-l*, that is, insofar as Allah collected in him the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of the hereafter.

Regarding the wisdom of this world it is said: "He was the wisest of all men" (1 Kgs 5:11), and: "He discoursed about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon" (1 Kgs 5:13). He indicated moreover that Allah—great and exalted—inspired him to acquire this wisdom, as it is said: "God endowed Solomon with wisdom" (1 Kgs 5:9). Thus he discoursed on the species of plants and all the trees, large and small, as it is said: "from the cedar in Lebanon" (1 Kgs 5:13). He taught the people the properties of all the trees and their utilities—every single one—and which ones are dangerous; and likewise the utilities of shrubs and seeds and herbs—which ones are useful and which dangerous, which can be used as nutrition and which can lead to poisoning and cause death, which ones mix and which combine. And by knowing this science he was able to know all human illnesses and diseases, both external and internal. He thus classified the various elixirs, theriacs, and digestifs, and all things people require of the various types of remedies. He was the master of every sage and philosopher. And because of him everyone was helped by the wisdom of the "Book of Plants" to its end. All people of the world accept the authority of Sulaymān [Solomon].

He likewise taught the people the utilities of the beasts and gave instruction regarding their harmful properties: which is domesticated with cloven foot and chews its cud; which has cloven foot but does not chew its cud; which chews its cud but does not have cloven foot; which has hoofs and which has claws, whether large or small, as it is said: "and he discoursed about beasts" (1 Kgs 5:13). He taught first their characters and their natures and what utility their limbs have [when treating] illnesses, diseases, and sicknesses, chronic and otherwise, external as well as concealed and internal. So too did he discourse on the natures of the various types of feathered fowl and water fowl and their utilities and harmful properties and characters and what can be used of each of them, as it is said: "and on birds" (1 Kgs 5:13). So he discoursed on the natures of the various types of creeping things including those that crawl, such as the viper and asp, those that walk on four legs, such as the dung beetle and ant, as well as those that have many legs, such as scorpions, as it is said: "on creeping things" (1 Kgs 5:13). He likewise discoursed on the natures of the fish of the sea with their many genera and species and individuals, as it is said: "with its creatures beyond number" (Ps 104:25). He taught the people their utilities and harmful properties and characters, as it is said: "on fish" (1 Kgs 5:13).

So, too, did he know the nature of all the various types of soil and had complete grasp of the science of minerals, the various species of gems, the divisions of the winds and cause of the different types of water, including bitter, salty, sulfurous, sweet, and toxic, as it is said: "but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement" (2 Kgs 2:19). Likewise did he know the fine points of the sciences of geometry and arithmetic and the movement of the stars, so well that the great kings were forced to seek his advice, even coming to Jerusalem to learn from him; they recorded these sciences, which they would study, as it is said: "All the world came to pay homage to Solomon" (1 Kgs 10:24); "and each one would bring his tribute" (1 Kgs 10:25). So too did the Queen of Sheba come to him with questions, and he answered everything she asked him. He had no difficulty whatsoever in answering whatever she asked so that she submitted [to him] and acknowledged the wisdom of Sulaymān, peace be with him. And what she witnessed was far greater than what is connected with her.

As for the wisdom of the Torah, Allah—great and exalted—said to him in a dream: "Ask, what shall I grant you" (1 Kgs 3:5), and he said: "Grant, then, your servant an understanding mind to judge your people" (1 Kgs 3:9), to which Allah replied: "I now do as you have spoken; I grant you a wise and discerning mind; there has never been anyone like you before" (1 Kgs 3:12). He also said: "And all Israel heard the decision that the king had rendered" (1 Kgs 3:28). Then when all the different areas of wisdom were collected in him he was called *Qoheleth*; and likewise when prophecy and wisdom and kingship and anointedness and lineage and beauty and love from Allah and peace and security and wealth and good memory and fear and the collection of warriors and ministers and the building of the temple and marital alliance with kings were collected in Solomon, peace be with him—with the collecting of all of these states and their like he was called *Qoheleth*.

The term *Qoheleth* is feminine, as he said [using the third-person grammatical feminine form]: "said Qoheleth" (Heb. *'amrah*, Qoh 7:27). What this means is that, just as a woman gives birth and raises children, so Qoheleth draws out wisdom and organizes it according to its types and classifies it in divisions. Some have suggested that [the feminine verb] *'amrah* ([she] said, at Qoh 7:27) refers back to the Holy Spirit, for it had already been said [here, using the masculine]: *'amar* ([he] said, Qoh 1:2), which refers back to him.

He says: "son of David"—this makes known his lineage, indicating that he hails from the sons of Perez, son of Judah, son of Jacob our father,

peace be with him; and Perez was the one fit for kingship since he was
the eldest son, as it was said: "and out came his brother" (Gen 38:29),
while of Zerah it was said: "Afterward his brother came out, on whose
hand was the crimson thread" (Gen 38:30). He said "son of David" also
in order to honor him, for he is a prophet son of a prophet, an anointed
one son of an anointed one, a chosen one son of a chosen one, a king
son of a king. Yet another reason he said "son of David" is that prophe-
cies and writings were written for David, so Qoheleth had prophecies
and writings, including [the books of] Proverbs and the Song of Songs
and Qoheleth.

He says: "king"—that is, these words were spoken by Sulaymān the
king. They are not like other sayings produced by someone without a set-
tled heart. For this reason he said: "Listen, for I speak noble things" (Prov
8:6). He says: "in Jerusalem"—that is, he is the chosen king of the chosen
people in the chosen place. Jerusalem itself had already been called "the
throne of YHWH," as it is said: "Solomon successfully took over the throne
of YHWH as king instead of his father David, and all went well with him"
(1 Chr 29:23). And it is said: "By that time they shall call Jerusalem the
throne of YHWH" (Jer 3:17).

2. *Vanity of vanities, said Qoheleth, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!*

Dust of dust, said Qoheleth, dust of dust. All is dust.

The sage, peace be with him, intended in this dictum to teach the people
of the world that all things of this world and what people occupy them-
selves with in terms of toil and work and building and planting and the
amassing of numerous supplies and property—all of it is dust and of no
value; not a thing in it persists for man. And since it is dust, one ought
to renounce it and turn oneself to something other than it, to that which
should be sought after. For this reason he said: *havel havalim*—that is, the
things of this world are at the utmost of what is dust, of no value, lack-
ing persistence; there should be no desire for it, for it will become as if it
never was.

He says: "all is dust, הבל (*hevel*)"—that is, what I said, namely, *havel
havalim*, I did not say in the sense that part is הבל and part is not הבל, but
rather all is הבל. For he will be annihilated and destroyed and pass away
and be cut off, while the only thing that will last are good works, as it is
said: "Your Vindicator shall march before you" (Isa 58:8).

As for the meaning of the sage's dictum, "all is dust"—he does not refer to created beings, for everything Allah created is wisdom, as it is said: "You have made them all with wisdom" (Ps 104:24), which has the same meaning as: "YHWH made everything for a purpose" (Prov 16:4). Since this is so, he said "everything is *hevel*" only with reference to excess, as in: "mere *hevel* is his hustle and bustle" (Ps 39:7). What is condemnable with respect to the things of this world is being completely preoccupied with desire for them and with increase in accumulating them and being distracted by passion for them and grasping at their trifles and having exaggerated love for them and gaining pleasure from them, for when a man keeps at these things constantly he loses his hereafter and remains among those that are lost. Nor does anything of what he labored over in the things of this world perdure, for there is no escape from privation and passing away, as is clear from this world's betrayal of its people. For there is no joy without sorrow in its train; no beneficence without poverty close behind; no majesty without humility as its consequence; no happiness without sorrow following after. While it is good to him, lo it will take from him; while it controls him, lo it will make him a slave; while it clothes him, lo it will strip him naked; while it feeds him, lo it will make him hungry; while it makes him happy, lo it will make him seek happiness. Thus everything in it, every one of these aspects, is "vanity." It is for this reason that he said: *havel havalim ha-kol hevel* (הבל הבלים הכל הבל).

3. *What value is there for a man in all the gains he makes under the sun?*

What profit has a person in all his work that he works under the sun?

He says: "What profit has a person"—that is, there is no profit for him in the acquiring of things of this world, not in the effort he puts into serving it or his work in building houses and planting gardens or his efforts to settle it, employing workers and servants and amassing property. We witness people exerting themselves in this matter and killing each other for it, yet when they die they leave it and pass away, as it is said: "for when he dies he cannot take all of it" (Ps 49:18). Nor will he know to whom it will pass, as it is said: "amassing and not knowing who will gather in" (Ps 39:7b). And nothing remains for a man of all he has amassed, nor does he take any pleasure in it, which is why he said: "What profit has a person in all his work that he works."

However, works relating to divine obedience—what a man does in connection with what Allah commanded him—this is what perdures for a man and what he benefits from in the hereafter, as it is said: "The righteous man finds security in his death" (Prov 14:32). His saying "under the sun" proves that he is referring to the works man does under the sun; the works of Torah, in contrast, are not under the sun, for it is said of the Torah: "I spoke to you from the very heavens" (Exod 20:22 [Eng. 20:20]). [Nor does this relate to the works of the righteous,] for the righteous, with their works, elevate their nature such that they reside among the angels, as it is said: "I will permit you to move about among these attendants" (Zech 3:7).

Now, if someone should say that Sulaymān in this dictum has prohibited us from settling this world, we would respond: He did not prohibit what cannot be avoided; rather, what he prohibited was greed and excess, as he says: "I have also noted that all labor" (Qoh 4:4); and he praised contentment, as when saying: "Better is a handful of gratification than two fistfuls of labor which is pursuit of wind" (Qoh 4:6).

Should someone say, on the other hand, that the prophets did accumulate property, we respond as follows: But they were collecting it in order to spend it properly, in the way that David, peace be with him, accumulated much property and spent it on building Jerusalem, and as Solomon collected it and stored it away in the house of the Lord for the benefit of the people. As for the other [prophets], you know the matter of Elijah: "with a leather belt tied round his waist" (2 Kgs 1:8); and he [God] said: "I have designated a widow there to feed you" (1 Kgs 17:9). And likewise it was said of Elisha: "A man came from Baal-shalishah and he brought the man of God some bread of the first reaping" (2 Kgs 4:42). It is the same with the sons of the prophets about whom it is said: "So one of them went out into the fields to gather sprouts. He came across a wild vine and picked from it wild gourds, as many as his garment would hold" (2 Kgs 4:39). He thought it was eggplant but was instead colocynth.

All of this points to two things: One is their limited occupation with this contemptible world, and that they did not elevate its affairs in any way. The second makes known the beauty of their contentment with little sustenance, their trust in what they knew they would have before their Lord. Do not suppose that had they sought wealth they could not have gotten it. Know that Naaman carried to Elisha, peace be with him, ten talents of silver, six thousand *dinār*, and ten robes of the finest raiment (see 2 Kgs 5:5), yet he [Elisha] did not take any of it at all and kept himself from it.

4. *One generation goes, another comes, but the earth remains the
same forever.*

**A generation goes, and a generation comes, and the earth for-
ever abides**.

Having said *havel havalim ha-kol hevel* (Qoh 1:2), he establishes now proof
for this from empirical evidence, saying: "a generation goes, and a genera-
tion comes"—this refers to annihilation and corruption and dissolution,
that is, the decomposition of the man's body and its departure from this
world after having passed from state to state. At first it was a fetid drop,
as it is said: "You poured me out like milk." And then it congeals as milk
congeals, as it is said: "Congealed me like cheese" (Job 10:10). Then bones
are formed and veins and nerves covered by flesh with skin above, as in:
"You clothed me with skin and flesh" (Job 10:11). Then he—great and
exalted—commands and he is brought out from the narrow place into this
world with great force, as it is said: "you drew me from the womb" (Ps
22:10a). Then when coming out he provides him with food, as it is said:
"made me secure at my mother's breast" (Ps 22:10b). Then he leads him
from weaning to childhood to youth to young adulthood to maturity to
old age to hoary old age to death, which means the decomposition of his
parts and separation of soul from body, as it is said: "His breath departs,
he returns to the dust" (Ps 146:4). Every state changes in him without his
choice; rather his Creator governs him and leads him, makes him live and
makes him die, as it is said: "YHWH deals death and gives life" (1 Sam
2:6). And as the first ones said: "For despite your wishes were you formed,
despite your wishes were you born, despite your wishes do you live, despite
your wishes do you die, and despite your wishes are you going to give a full
accounting before the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."
[m. Avot 4:29, Neusner's translation].

When saying: "a generation goes, and a generation comes"—Sulaymān
drew attention to the works of the Creator—great and exalted—indicat-
ing that man was not created to perdure in this world; and seeing that he
will not perdure, all the more so his accumulation [of wealth] and labor
[over it] will not perdure. Thus one ought to reflect and be content with
the nourishment one gets in this world, as Solomon, peace be with him,
said: "provide me with my daily bread" (Prov 30:8); and our master Moses,
peace be with him, said: "befriend the stranger, providing him with food
and clothing" (Deut 10:18).

This verse contains a reflection [Arab. *iʿtibār*] that a man ought to have his attention drawn to, for when he describes him—great and exalted—as having mercy on the stranger and loving him and governing him by providing food—which is the means he cannot live without, as it is said: "providing him with food and clothing" (Deut 10:18), and as Jacob our father, peace be with him, said: "and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear" (Gen 28:20)—all of this indicates that greed has no utility for man. His seeking to increase the wealth of this world only damages him, which is why Solomon, peace be with him, said: "Do not toil to gain wealth" (Prov 23:4); and: "You see it, then it is gone" (Prov 23:5); and: "A miserly man runs after wealth" (Prov 28:22)—as I explained these matters in the commentary on Proverbs.

I say, moreover, that no man who is intent on accumulating wealth can possibly escape from wrongdoing in his speech, in weights, in accounting, or during his negotiations; and even then he might bequeath to someone who may be a wicked fool who will spend it not to obey Allah but on acts of disobedience and offensive behavior and the committing of sins, which means his accumulating of wealth is in fact for the purpose of strengthening the wicked in acting rebelliously. We might say this even of someone exceedingly cautious, all the more of someone with passion for this world and little thought for what is permitted or prohibited, who has no fear of Allah, great and exalted. For this reason did the sage Sulaymān designate this book to arouse the people to renunciation of this world.

He makes reference to death when saying: "a generation goes." And when he says "a generation comes," he alludes to the perfection of the world from the six days of creation, drawing attention to empirical evidence of creation, for creation refers to something that was not, then was. When he says "and a generation comes" this is precisely the notion he intends. It is not as the fools think, namely, that Sulaymān aims to refer with this to the idea that the world, as it is, will never pass away. How is it possible for any rational person to think this? And indeed already in this book he says: "I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will recur evermore" (Qoh 3:14); while in another book he said: "YHWH founded the earth by wisdom" (Prov 3:19).

When he says: "and the earth forever abides"—he does not mean that the earth abides forever, for the term "forever" [Heb. *le-ʿolam*] is used in different senses. One is for a specific time, as in the statement of our master Moses, peace be with him: "and he shall remain his slave *le-ʿolam*" (Exod

21:6). One is the length of a man's life, as in: "he must remain there *'ad* *'olam* (1 Sam 1:22). It is the same as when he said of the earth and heavens: "they shall perish but you shall endure" (Ps 102:27). Thus we learn that "and the earth forever abides" alludes to the moment that Allah had set for it. And when the life of this [world] comes to an end, that is, the time span of this world, its Creator will annihilate it and create another, as it is said: "For behold! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth" (Isa 65:17). I already explained these matters sufficiently in the commentary on: "A prayer of the lowly man when he is faint" (Ps 102:1).

<div align="center">Qoheleth 4:17</div>

Mind your feet [*foot*] *when you go to the House of God: more accept-able is obedience than the offering of fools, for they know nothing* [*but*] *to do wrong.*

Control your pudendum <u>always</u>, as <u>at the time</u> when you go to the house of Allah; and coming close to hear <u>is better</u> than the ignorant giving sacrifices, for they know not the doing of evil.

After teaching that the wisdom of the world and its affairs are "dust," Salmon begins now with an exhortation to follow the will of Allah, to observe the commandments, and to work for the affairs of the hereafter, taking provisions in this world—which passes away—for the abode of everlasting life.

So he says: "mind your feet" [in the plural, following the written con-sonantal form, the *ketiv*], which is read: "your foot" [in the singular, as in the recited version according to Masoretic pointing, the *qere*]. He implores us to keep our pudenda [Arab. *furūj*] from committing sexual offence with forbidden women. When he says: "Keep thy foot" [*shamor raglekha*], it resembles the dictum: "he had not taken care of his feet" (2 Sam 19:25 NRSV), the translation of which is: [Arab.] *faraj*.

He says: "when you go to the house of God"—that is, someone who goes on pilgrimage to the house of Allah ought to be pure, free of iniquity and rebellious behavior, as our father Jacob, peace be with him, said: "Rid yourselves of the alien gods in your midst, purify yourselves, and change your clothes. Come, let us go up to Bethel" (Gen 35:2–3). Here he obligates man to be pure, free of all disobedient acts always as when he goes to the House of Allah.

"Better than the ignorant giving sacrifices"—getting close to hearken to the word of Allah is better than fools giving sacrifices; that is, accepting obedience to Allah and observing what he commanded and prohibited is better in Allah's view than fools giving sacrifices, as in the statement of master Samuel, peace be with him: "obedience is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22). And he said: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination" (Prov 21:27).

He says: "For they know nothing to do wrong"—this refers to the righteous that he mentioned at the beginning of the verse. He says that those who come close to the hearkening of the word of Allah, who keep his ways, will not know the doing of evil, meaning that they have already become accustomed to doing good and thus know not how to do evil. Another exegete said, in contrast, that his dictum: "For they know nothing to do wrong"—is connected to the "fools," since they in their foolishness do not know the measure of the doing of evil they approached, and Allah demands retribution of them first of all for their abandoning of wisdom and knowledge with respect to what Allah commanded. Yet another exegete said: "For they know nothing to do wrong"—that is, they know only to do evil; that is, for the fools understand nothing but the doing of evil deeds, as it is said: "They are clever at doing wrong" (Jer 4:22).

Qoheleth 7:16

Do not be too righteous, and do not be too wise; why should you destroy yourself? (NRSV)

Be not righteous over much; neither make yourself over wise. Why should you become desolate <u>and destroy yourself</u>?

Sulaymān said that Allah—great and exalted—forces man into servitude and imposes upon him what he knows he can do. He does not impose upon him what he cannot do, for the imposition of something one cannot do is oppressive and lacking in justice, as the prophet Micah, peace be on him, said: "My people! What wrong have I done you? What hardship have I caused you" (Mic 6:3). And since commands and prohibitions are given according to the measure of ability, he established stipulations lest a transgressor overstep the boundaries, adding or removing, as he said: "You shall not add anything to what I command you" (Deut 4:2).

What he says here (in Qoh 7:16) is similar: "Do not be too righteous"—that is, do not do what Allah has not commanded, that is, do not fast so

much that it makes you weak; do not say: "This year I will not eat bread, I will eat vegetables only." Perhaps you will attack your body, weaken it, and kill yourself. Nor ought you to engage in monastic isolation in the mountains and deserts thinking that in this way you are coming near to Allah. Perhaps you will be led astray and kill yourself. And in any event this is not something Allah has required of you. Or sometimes you might consider as follows: that charity is a noble act might lead you to distribute everything you own; as a result you yourself will become a mendicant requiring charity. Yet Allah did not make it incumbent upon you to give all your wealth as charity. On the contrary, it is said: "Honor YHWH with your wealth" (Prov 3:9), and: "for he gives his bread to the poor" (Prov 22:9). It was not said: "all his bread." Likewise Job, peace be with him, said: "By eating my food alone, the fatherless not eating of it also" (Job 31:17). Nor ought a man to say that he will not allow himself to engage in a profession since it is impossible to free oneself from false speech and the fixing of scales—as a result of which he cuts himself off from a livelihood. And it is possible that in a time of hunger he will need to steal or will take a vow upon himself to fast forever, yet sometimes an illness will supervene which will lead him to break the vow. There are innumerable similar examples. Because of this he said: "Do not be too righteous"—that is, do not impose upon yourself that which you cannot do. Know that the One that requires service—great and exalted—judges and sees the service you do. Blessed is he who exerts himself working constantly in what he commands, as is said: "happy are those who keep the law" (Prov 29:18 NRSV).

"Do not act too wise"—that is, just as he commanded you not to add upon yourself to what he commanded and prohibited, so he commands that you not be over wise, that is, saying: "I will study the sciences of this world," as a result of which he abandons the wisdom of Torah. He explained this at the end of the book, saying: "Of anything beyond these, my child, beware. Of making many books there is no end" (Qoh 12:12 NRSV). All the more so someone who has no worry or toil but rather wanders around in the cities and markets seeking foreign books such as the books of the philosophers and the books of Ibn al-Rāwandī and the books of Ibn Suwayd which lead to unbelief with respect to Allah and his prophets and his book. Allah takes vengeance against them who have deeds and ways like these; it is what leads people such as these to eternal existence in *Jahannam* [Arab. "hell"], especially someone who takes money from the poor and orphans and widows and spends it on books such as these and fears not nor submits piously to the Merciful. When it is said to them that

such action is prohibited, they consider him who reproaches them a fool and ridicule him. As they withdraw amongst themselves, they diminish only themselves, not Allah and his book. Allah will surely take vengeance against them and remove their veil within the community and not give them any rank or knowledge and will make them as those about whom it is said: "My hand will be against the prophets who prophesy falsehood" (Ezek 13:9)—they and their helpers and their friends and benefactors along with those who rise up against God's fearful servants, and those who advise ill against them; Amen, Amen. [The last sentence was written originally in Hebrew.]

He says: "do not act too wise" after having said: "Do not be too righteous." He means: do not question the meanings of Allah's book, saying: "Why did he command this and why not this or that?"—as did Hiwi al-Balkhi, may Allah curse him. He [Hiwi] said: "Why did he [God] command sacrifices if he requires no nourishment?" "Why did he command the shewbread if he does not eat it?" "Why did he command lamps if he requires no illumination?" Already the sages, may their memory be for a blessing, responded to him and rebuked him. They said to him: O fool, how can he be nourished from the sacrifices? Does not the fire consume part of them whereas the other part is eaten by the priests? How can he eat the shewbread when the priests eat it, as it is said: "It shall belong to Aaron and his sons, who shall eat it in a sacred precinct" (Lev 24:9)? How could he need illumination? Is he not the creator of fire and light, as it is said: "God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light" (Gen 1:3), and the prophet Isaiah, peace be with him, said: "I form light and create darkness" (Isa 45:7). He—great and exalted—is above these attributes and has been cleansed of them, as it is said: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls?" (Ps 50:13). He teaches, moreover, that he—great and exalted—did not command this; rather it is for the utility of man and his success, as it is said: "Sacrifice a thank offering to God" (Ps 50:14), "Call upon Me in time of trouble" (Ps 50:15). This is why he says here: "Do not act too wise"—that is, do not question Allah, thinking that your knowledge is stronger and deeper; rather ought you to trust in Allah and receive all that he commands you, as it is said: "Trust in the LORD and do good" (Ps 37:3); "Trust in the LORD with all your heart" (Prov 3:5).

He says: "Why should you destroy yourself" [Heb. *lama tishomem*]—that is, as soon as you abandon study of the book and occupy yourself with something other than it or question Allah with respect to what he commanded and prohibited, you will become bereft of knowing what you ought

to know. He speaks like Uzziah, about whom it was said: "And his mind was elevated" (2 Chr 17:6), and: "When he was strong, he grew so arrogant" (2 Chr 26:16). And his affair continued until: "he trespassed against his God by entering the Temple of YHWH" (v. 16), "When the chief priest Azariah and all the other priests looked at him" (2 Chr 26:20)—continuing to the end of the story.

<div align="center">Qoheleth 12:12</div>

Of anything beyond these, my son, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (NRSV)

And more than these, O my son, be warned: the making of many books has no end; and much devotion [to them] is labor <u>and toil</u> for the flesh.

Sulaymān the sage adds here a warning and threat regarding the desire for foreign books, saying: "Of anything beyond these, my son, beware"—that is, beware lest you come to desire books other than the revealed holy books, for when someone has desire for something other than them he acquires ignorance and what is lacking in wisdom, as it is said: "they rejected the word of YHWH so their wisdom amounts to nothing" (Jer 8:9).

He says: "My son, beware"—that is, he who desires the holy books is a student of the prophets and a student of Qoheleth, and still more than this a student of his Creator, as it is said: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you for your own good" (Isa 48:17 NRSV), and "He engirded him, watched over him" (Deut 32:10). In contrast, he who desires the wisdom of strangers has become a student of the unbelievers and the heretics and the materialists and the dualists and the trinitarians; of them that discourse on natural science; of the Brahmins who deny prophecy; of them that discourse on prime matter; of them that believe in worshiping fire and water; and all the other sages of the various false sects about whom it is said in general: "for the laws of the nations are *hevel*" (Jer 10:3), and: "to you nations shall come from the ends of the earth" (Jer 16:19). Were there in the world any [other] book which has utility or benefit, why would he say exclusively of the Torah of Moses: "but recite it day and night" (Josh 1:8)?! Rather would he have said: "[recite it] and external, nonbiblical books" [Heb. *sefarim ḥitsoniyim*].

Since he specifically designated this enjoinder (i.e., Josh 1:8) for this Torah—along with the other words of prophecy, as it is said: "to seal (both) vision and prophet" (Dan 9:24 NRSV), and indeed it is made obligatory in the Torah of Moses itself, "the man of God" (Deut 33:1), peace be with him, to accept the word of the prophets, as it is said: "a prophet from among your own people like myself" (Deut 18:15)—we learn that any speculation in and occupation with any book other than the books of the prophets is forbidden [Arab. ḥarām] for Israel, for it leads to the beliefs of the gentiles. As for him that renounces the book of Allah and desires the books of the gentiles, Allah testifies regarding him that he is a renouncer of the Creator. Allah will make judgment of anyone who leads the people to desire the books of the gentiles and leads them to renounce the book of Allah.

He says: "Of making many books there is no end"—that is, there is no end to foreign books. One ought to direct oneself to the books of the prophets for which Allah has already made a limit and measure, and with respect to which he commanded not to add to them or diminish therefrom, as he says: "Do not add to His words, lest He indicts you and you be proved a liar" (Prov 30:6).

He says: "and much study is a weariness of flesh"—he means that much devotion to anything other than the book of Allah will weary the body and cause grave sin. For he has already obligated us to meditate upon the book of Allah day and night, as it is said: "recite it day and night" (Josh 1:8), thus anytime you are occupied with any other book besides the book of Allah you have already violated this commandment and perverted the straight. Our master Moses, peace be with him, said: "these instructions with which I charge you" (Deut 6:6); "recite them to your sons" (Deut 6:7 adapted from NRSV; NRSV and JPS: "children").

Already the first ones said: "And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come … He who reads in heretical [= external, nonbiblical] books" (m. Sanh. 10:1, Neusner's translation). Our Book and our Way and our Guidance is sufficient for us, as it is said: "Your word is a lamp to my feet" (Ps 119:105); and: "the unfolding of your words gives light" (Ps 119:130 NRSV); and: "For the commandment is a lamp" (Prov 6:23). In contrast to this, he said of foreign books: "All who go to her cannot return" (Prov 2:19).

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Yefet ben ʻEli: A Selection from the Commentary on Qoheleth (Preface; 1:1–4; 1:8; 1:12; 4:17; 5:1; 6:6; 12:12)

James T. Robinson

Yefet ben ʻEli was the most prolific of the Karaite exegetes, producing a complete translation and commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible. The work on Qoheleth was likely written in the 990s. It is very characteristic of his work as a whole. In terms of general form it includes a short exordium in Hebrew, followed by an Arabic translation of each verse with a commentary, sometimes lengthy and detailed. The commentary itself varies throughout, but there are common tendencies, for instance an obsession with the literary context—every verse needs to fit into its place in the book, following logically from the section before and setting up the verse that follows. Yefet also identifies a general structure for the book as a whole, identifying different literary units as he moves along. He surveys earlier explications critically, introduced by "some commentators said," "they said," or simply "it has been said," before presenting his own preferred interpretation. This gives the commentary a strongly anthological feel, although Yefet's commentarial voice is always strongly present. Although there is ample discussion of grammar and lexicon in the commentary, for the most part Yefet is interested in meaning in context, Arabic *maʻna*.

The samples singled out below reflect all of these tendencies and relate to some of the key themes motivating his commentary. In the commentary on Qoh 1:1 and continuing through 1:3, Yefet introduces the main subjects of Qoheleth and the purpose of its author. He also differentiates between the work of a later editor or redactor of the work, Arabic *mudawwin*, responsible for the first few verses, from the work of Solomon himself. The discussion of the work of the *mudawwin* is found also at Qoh 1:12, where Yefet works to explain the problematic past perfect in that verse: "I, Qoheleth, had been king in Jerusalem." At Qoh 1:8 and 5:1, Yefet emphasizes

the limitations of human knowledge and the need for humans to submit piously to divine will. This focus on pious adherence to divine law and Scripture is found also in Yefet's polemic against "foreign books" at Qoh 12:12, a topos found already in Salmon's commentary. As for the relation to Salmon in general, Qoh 4:17 provides a nice contrast, while Qoh 6:6, against the rabbinic idea that Elijah was occulted, shows the existence of a continuous tradition of reading throughout the Karaite tradition.

The first six chapters of Yefet's commentary on Qoheleth were edited with English translation by Richard Bland in his unpublished doctoral dissertation.[1] Selections were published with French translation by Georges Vajda.[2] The translations here of Qoh 1:1–4; 1:8; 1:12; 4:17; 5:1; and 6:6 are based on Bland's edition and English translation. The translation of 12:12 is based on my forthcoming edition and translation of the entire commentary.

In this essay, after the Exordium (only in an English translation of the original Hebrew), the selected biblical verses are presented (in italics), in most cases and without extra markings, in the English rendering of the JPS (1985) translation, slightly modified at places; at times, when the NRSV is more precise, or bears a greater similarity to Yefet's rendering, it is reproduced instead (and marked as such). The next step is an English rendering of Yefet's translation of the relevant verses (in boldface) and, finally, his commentary on them. Hebrew and Arabic words will be given in simple transliteration, and additional matters in parentheses.

Exordium (originally in Hebrew)

In the name of YHWH we shall commence and succeed

In the name of YHWH the living and eternal God, first and last, who creates all and sustains the life of all, governs all and carries out his will in all, and there is no deliverance from his hand, who performs kindness [Heb. ḥesed] *and judgment and justice in his world, and who will tell him: You have done wrong? He who understands human thoughts because he creates their heart together, who knows the mysteries of the heart, who teaches humans to know him,*

1. Richard Bland, "The Arabic Commentary of Yephet ben ʿAli on the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapters 1–6" (PhD diss., University of California, 1966).

2. Georges Vajda, *Deux commentaires karaïtes sur l'Ecclésiastes* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

because he is their creator and treats each one of them as deserved, in his wisdom and sagacity. And this [divine] knowledge is beyond humans, awe-inspiring, they cannot handle it. And if the wise [man] would try to know, he cannot find [it]. And therefore he [Qoheleth] said: "and deep, deep down, who can discover it?" *(Qoh 7:24). And a foolish man [Heb. kesil] says: Why is this? And for what is this? And he [God] sees all created creatures, that one is not similar to the other and that one is different from the other. And a person [Heb. ben ʾadam, "son of man"] should think in his heart that he who created all did not create the world for his own needs, but to inform his creatures of his competence and wisdom, as it is written:* "to make His mighty acts known among men" *(Ps 145:12). And the poet [David] said:* "How great are Your works, O Lord" *(Ps 92:6). And he said:* "How many are the things You have made, O Lord; You have made them all with wisdom," *and so on (Ps 104:24),* "A brutish man cannot know, a fool cannot understand this" *(Ps 96:7). And the wise person will understand YHWH's deeds and his wonders, and will praise YHWH, as it is written:* "I praise You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made; Your work is wonderful; I know it very well" *(Ps 139:14).*

<div align="center">Qoheleth 1:1–4</div>

1. *The words of Qoheleth son of David, king in Jerusalem.*

The <u>discourse</u> [Arab. *kalaam*] of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

In the preface to Song of Songs we already discussed the purpose of each of the books of Solomon, namely, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Qoheleth. We say that the purpose of this book revolves about two things. One is that the works of man, many though they may be, fall into only two categories: the first consists of this-worldly actions that will neither benefit him for the Abode of Perdurance nor prejudice him, they being indifferent actions, as we will explain at: "what real value is there for a man" (Qoh 1:3). The second consists of actions having to do with command and prohibition for which one will be rewarded or punished. It is with these that he concluded his book: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone" (Qoh 12:13 NRSV).

The second includes three things: first, the urging of the people to renounce excess with respect to accumulating wealth and overindulgence with respect to food and drink, and at the same time condemning those who withdraw completely, refusing to enjoy the worldly pleasures that Allah Most High has created for man; second, exhorting the people to obedience while teaching them proper guidance in the Abode of this World; third, prohibiting the people from being occupied with *sifre ḥitsonim* ["external books"], as we will explain at: "my son, be warned! The making of many books is without limit" (Qoh 12:12). He himself had gained wide knowledge of the various types of indifferent actions, and he made known that they will be of no utility for the Abode of Perdurance in order to exhort men toward what will be of benefit to them in the Abode of Perdurance.

The book bears the title "The Words of Qoheleth" for one of three possible reasons: (1) because it is speech [Arab. *kalaam*] in the literal sense, following narrative form [Arab. *rasm al-qisas*] rather than the form of song [Heb. *shir*] or proverbs [Heb. *meshalim*]; or (2) because among the contents of this book are accounts [Arab. *akhbaar*] concerning himself, as in: "The words of Jeremiah" (Jer 1:1), peace be upon him, in which he explained the events [Arab. *qisas*] that happened to him; and: "The words of Amos" (Amos 1:1), discussing in his book what befell him at the hands of Amaziah, priest of Bethel (Amos 7:10); or (3) because he intended to attach this book to Proverbs. That is to say, in the book of Proverbs he used the phrase "proverbs of Solomon" three times: first, in the beginning of the book (Prov 1:1); second, in: "The proverbs of Solomon: a wise son brings joy to his father" (Prov 10:1); third, in: "These too are the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov 25:1). Then he said further on: "The words of Agur son of Jakeh" (Prov 30:1), and secondly: "The words of Lemuel, king …" (Prov 31:1). To these latter two he then joined: "the words of Qoheleth," with the result that there are three sections [Arab. *fuṣuul*] of "proverbs of" and likewise three sections [Arab. *dufaʿāt*] of "words of."

He named him Qoheleth rather than Solomon in accordance with his design [Arab. *rasm*]; that is, wherever he used the phrase "proverbs of" he called him Solomon, and whenever he used "words of" he used another name, as in: words of Agur, words of Lemuel, and likewise here: words of Qoheleth.

The simple meaning of Qoheleth is: "she who gathers" [Arab. *jāmiʿah*], from the lexical class [Arab. *min lugha*] q/h/l. We have found many terms for gathering: [Heb.] *qebitsah*, *asifah*, and *kenisah* are used with human

beings as well as furnishings, silver, gold, and the like; [Heb.] *agirah*, in contrast, we have not found with reference to human beings and animals, while [Heb.] *qehillah* we find used only with humans. Thus Solomon was called Agur because of the various disciplines of wisdom [Arab. *aṣnāf al-hokhmot*] combined in him, and he was called Qoheleth for one of two reasons: either because he gathers [Arab. *jāmi'*] in this book all classes [Arab. *tabaqaat*] of men, for he did not pass over even one without mentioning it in this book; or because he gathers [*jāmi'*] all the kings of the earth by his wisdom, as it is said: "and all the kings of the earth came to pay homage to Solomon" (2 Chr 9:23). Thus, by virtue of his wisdom, he made them assemble about him at some place. He ascribed the activity to his wisdom [Heb. *hokhmah*, a feminine noun] and for that reason put Qoheleth in the feminine gender [Heb. *leshon neqevah*]; when he said *'amrah* [feminine verb, "said"] Qoheleth (at Qoh 7:27), it was *hokhmah* speaking.

He says: "king in Jerusalem"—this makes known to us that he was indeed Solomon, for it might be that David had a son named Qoheleth other than Solomon, but we know from his saying "king in Jerusalem" that he was Solomon, for David had no other son who was king in Jerusalem. The reason [Arab. *al-ma'na*] for making this known to us is that when people would read its title and realize that it is a discourse [*kalaam*] of Solomon, they would study it and set their minds on his discourse, for it is the discourse of a sage rich in ideas [Arab. *ghaziir al-ma'aani*].

Know that *qoheleth* is similar in form to *shoma'at* [Heb. "who hears"]. Its imperative [Arab. *amr*] is *qehal*, as with *shema'*. The translation/meaning [*tafsiir*] of *qehal* is "assemble" [Arab. *ajma'*], as with *haqhel* [*hiphil*]. Both have the same meaning [*tafsiir*], just as *keroth* and *hakhret* [Heb. "cut"], both have the same meaning [*tafsiir*]; likewise *shelaḥ* and *hashlaḥ* [Heb. "cast," "send"].

2. *Vanity of vanities!—said Qoheleth—Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!*[3]

O man affected by a multiplicity of loss, said Qoheleth, O man affected by a multiplicity of loss, all is loss—<u>a term that may also be interpreted "dust."</u>

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3. The enigmatic Heb. text *havel havalim … hevel* is largely understood as "futility," "vanity," "dust," "breath," etc. Yefet understands it as "loss" and understands *havel* as a person possessed of loss, as he explains in his commentary.

In their opinion, it is generally thought that *havel* is a term for a ray of sunlight in which something like dust [Arab. *jabaar*] becomes visible. You stretch out your hand and grasp it, but there is nothing in your hand. *Havel* is in the grammatical form [Arab. *wazn*] of: *ḥalebh goyim* ("milk of nations," Isa 60:16) and is a substantial noun [Arab. *ism jism*].

Know that he said: *dibhrey qoheleth* (Qoh 1:1) and then went on to clarify that the words of Qoheleth are concerned with the subject of *havel havalim*, since the expression *dibhrey* [Heb. "words" and also "things"] could refer to a variety of subjects. Know also that *havel* is a term for an individual [Arab. *insaan*] who has exhausted himself and become wretched in things that do not last for him, just as one is called *rash* [Heb, "poor"] because of poverty which has befallen him. He puts *havalim* in the plural [Heb. *leshon rabbim*] in view of the fact that *havalim* of various kinds mentioned in this book affect him.

Know also that in this book there are two types of *hevel*. Some are *hevel* in the sense that they do not last for their owner, though they may be useful in the Abode of this World, for example, estates, plantations, money, and similar things that serve man in this world of his. They are *havalim*, however, in view of the fact that he will leave them behind and they will become the property of others, as it is said: "for when he dies he can take none of it along" (Ps 49:18). The other type of *havalim* is not only not beneficial, but obviously harmful, as in: "Even if a man should beget a hundred (children)" (Qoh 6:3)—as we will explain, each in its proper place. For this reason he said *havel havalim* twice. As for his saying: *ha-kol havel*—this implies that this phrase applies to both of these categories inasmuch as none of these things remains his possession because he is separated from them.

These two verses were added by the editor [Arab. *mudawwin*] and do not belong to the "words of Qoheleth." However, he wanted to begin with a statement on the aim of the book similar to what he said in Proverbs, from the verse: "for learning wisdom and discipline" (Prov 1:2), to the end of that section in which he explained the aim of that book and its utilities.

3. *What gain*[4] *is there for a man from all the toil which he toils under the sun* (NRSV, modified).

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4. Heb.: *mah yitron …*

Nothing is left to man from all his labor or his toil that he labors under the sun.

This verse is the beginning proper of the "words of Qoheleth." In our language [i.e., Hebrew] the particle [Arab. *lafẓa*] *mah* ["how," "why," "what"] can be used for both negation and affirmation, and one determines whether it is negative or affirmative from its context [Arab. *ma'na*]. It is affirmative in: "How lovely, how beautiful they shall be" (Zech 9:17); "how [*mah*] sweet is your love" (Song 4:10); and in many other places in Scripture. It is negative in: "what [*mah*] does he care about the fate of his family" (Job 21:21). It is also used in an interrogative sense, as in: "whatever [*mah*] you want" (1 Sam 20:4), and for disapprobation, as in: "why [*mah*] are you here" (1 Kgs 19:9, 13; Isa 22:16), and: "how [*mah*] dare you crush my people" (Isa 3:15). In *mah yitron* it is negative, with the meaning: a man has no *yitron*.

Yitron stands for *ytr*, the translation [Arab. *tafsiir*] of which is remainder [Arab. *bāqiya*] or merit [Arab. *faḍīla*], that is, *yitron* has two possible interpretations/translations [Arab. pl. *tafsiirayn*]. It may be interpreted as "merit," as in "wisdom is superior to folly" (Qoh 2:13), but it cannot be so interpreted here, since it is inevitable that there be some sort of merit or benefit. Do you not see, he did not say what is beneficial for a man, but rather *mah yitron la-ʾadam*, meaning that when he dies, not a single thing will remain in his possession. Instead: "and leave their wealth to others" (Ps 49:11 NRSV).

The phrase "for a man" has both a general and a specific sense. In its general sense it refers to the ruler and to those under him down to the lowest ranking of the people, the believer and the unbeliever alike. In its specific sense, responsible people capable of discernment are not included in it.

"From all his toil"—this also has a general and a specific sense. In its general sense it applies to every type of variety of earthly works, but in its specific sense the doing of *mitsvot YHWH* (God's commandments) is not included in it, since this is of eternal benefit to man, as it is written: "by the pursuit of which man shall live" (Lev 18:5).

Know that when he says "in all" [Heb. *be-kol*] he does not intend the prescribed actions themselves, like the *mitsvot* that consist of prescribed acts. He has in mind, rather, completed activities and things which he acquired, such as a building, plantations, furnishings, jewelry, and the like. He said "in all his toil that he toils" only because of the fact that among

men's actions are some that are actions and nothing else; and he declared that his assertion in those actions until that thing is done will not be of eternal benefit to him. There is no difference between the things in which he himself engages and those things which he uses and for which he spends his money or toils his mind. It is all his labor, as he will say later: "I hated all my toils" (Qoh 2:18 NRSV), though the craftsman did the work.

The expressions "under the sun," "on earth," and "under heaven" are all used in a specific way in this book. In one place he says "under heaven" and in another "done on earth." They serve the same purpose, but "under heaven" is a more general expression than "under the sun," since what is done at night is "under heaven" but not "under the sun." Likewise, "under the sun" is more general than "on earth" for those sailing on the sea are not "on earth." He probably says "under heaven" because "heaven" encompasses the earth and everything on it, and there is no activity of man anywhere that is not "under heaven." He says "under the sun" because Allah made the daylight for men to carry on worldly activities and to pursue their livelihoods, and he made the night as a time of rest for men and for the prowling of the beasts of prey, as it is written: "You make darkness … the young lions roar.…When the sun rises … people go out for their work …" (Ps 104:20–23 NRSV). Moreover, all of men's labor can be done in the daylight, but there are many activities that are not done in the daylight. He says "on earth" because it is their habitation, as it is written: "but the earth He gave over to men" (Ps 115:16).

Another teaching [Arab. *qawl akhar*] in "under the sun" is that the sun rather than any star separates the days, and each day man performs the labor in which they are engaged. Therefore he says: "that he toils under the sun."

4. *One generation goes, another comes, and the earth remains the same forever.*

A generation goes and a generation comes, and the earth persists <u>to eternity</u>.

Know that he began with: "What gain [Heb. *yitron*] is there for a man" (Qoh 1:3) but he did not follow this with the toil of men. Instead he took up another subject [Arab. *maʿna*] from: "A generation goes" (Qoh 1:4) through "I, Qoheleth" (Qoh 1:12). We will explain the reason for this after the interpretation [Arab. *tafsiir*] of the verse is completed.

He says: "A generation [Heb. *dor*] goes"—this does not refer to the lifespan of an individual person, though this may be called according to the view of some of the exegetes with respect to Hezekiah's statement: "My age is departed and is removed" (Isa 38:12 KJV). Rather, he refers to the generation of every age, whether their lifetimes be long or short, a son following after the father, as it is written in Job: "four generations" (Job 42:16); and similarly: "blameless in his generation" (Gen 6:9 NRSV; תמים היה). It is also said that a *dor* is [the period of time] in which the people propagate themselves, one coming immediately after the other. Similarly, they immediately turn away from the commandments, as it is written about the fathers: "this evil generation" (Deut 1:35); "Forty years I was provoked by this generation" (Ps 95:10). The same is true for: "A generation goes."

He says: "A generation goes"—this refers to the passing from the surface of the earth to the grave, similar to the statement further on in this book: "but man sets out to his eternal abode" (Qoh 12:5); the saying of Job: "And I shall go the way of no return" (Job 16:22); and those of David: "I shall go to him" (2 Sam 12:23); and: "I am going the way of all earth" (1 Kgs 2:2).

He says: "and a generation comes"—this means: comes to the world after them. He says "comes" [Heb. *ba'*] rather than "arise" [Heb. *qam*] as in: "and another generation arose" (Judg 2:10); "He had raised up their sons" (Josh 5:7); "and rise up and tell their sons" (Ps 78:6 NRSV modified). He does this in order to use a term comparable to "goes" as if to say: "a generation goes from the world and a generation comes into the world," so that the world is not left uninhabited. He said "goes" and "comes" rather than "will go" and "will come," the difference being that "comes" indicates something happening every day. It is well-known that "comes" is prior in time to "goes." [The reason that he put "goes" first is that] had he put "come" before "goes," he would have depicted one generation only which will come into the world and go from the world. Hence he put "goes" first in order to mention two generations, one passing away and another that will come. Another possibility is that he spoke first about the existing generation and then continued with the one that will come after it.

By placing "and the earth remains the same forever" before "a generation comes, and a generation goes," he points to the difference between man and the earth, that is, the earth is man's habitation and could not possibly come to an end with the passing away of each and every generation. Furthermore, the earth is an element [Arab. *ʿunṣūr*], unlike mankind which is not elemental, but rather comes to be like the plants. Another meaning is that the earth remains after him for the possession of others, so

that even if men do possess some part of it, they will pass away from it, but it stays on after those who pass away from it.

Now that we have given the interpretation of this verse, let us discuss his reason [Arab. *ma‘na*] for having this verse follow "what gain [*yitron*] is there for a man" (Qoh 1:3). We maintain that he is furnishing proof of the validity of his teaching, that is, man is not permanent, but rather passes away, and anything of the earth that he possesses—and this is the most important of his possessions—remains behind him, and someone else will come after him and take it over. Thus his statement that "what gain is there for a man in all his toil" is confirmed. As for *mitsvot YHWH*, they endure for him and because of him.

<div style="text-align:center">

Qoheleth 1:8

</div>

> *All* [*such*] *things are wearisome: no man can ever state them; the eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear enough of hearing.*

All things are wearisome, <u>one</u> is not able to speak; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

He says: "all things"—it is possible this refers to all existing things, for we have *debharim* which are interpreted as "things," as in: "so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes," and so on (Deut 4:9). He would not have said "which your eyes have seen" about "words" [the same in Hebrew as "things"]. So also it is possible that "all things are wearisome" alludes to all the created beings which he has not already mentioned in this preface.

He makes known that men grow weary in them—he means they discuss them but never cover them completely. Yet their lives are dependent upon them and they want to understand them, so they weary themselves but do not succeed because these things are so many, as he says: "the eye never has enough of seeing"—because it does not see all of them. There are things on land and in the sea and in the heavens to which men have never attained so that they might exhaust seeing them.

Similarly: "the ear [never] has enough of hearing"—for every day a man hears new things, and even if he should live a great number of years, he would still not hear everything about YHWH's deeds and his wonders, as it is written: "How great are your works, oh Lord" (Ps 92:6). This refers not to men's talk and reports, but to the works of Allah, exalted be he.

If we were to say that the interpretation [Arab. *tafsiir*] of *kol ha-deb-harim* is "all the words," then it would refer to all the words which men use in speaking about *maʿaseh YHWH*. [Heb., "God's deed"]. These are words in which they grow weary.

Qohelethʾs purpose in this verse is to show that these created things are innumerable and incomprehensible, so that if an individual should desire to busy himself with them until he understands them, he will not succeed for two reasons: first, because of their great numbers; second, because among them are hidden things—*gedolot ve-niflaʾot* [Heb., "great and miraculous things"]—and though men burden themselves with speaking about them, they will never fully understand them. In a similar sense, Elihu son of Barachel, the Buzite, said: "See, God is greater than we can know" (Job 36:26); "He works wonders that we cannot understand" (Job 37:5); and David said: "I do not aspire to great things or to what is beyond me" (Ps 131:1).

These texts forbid man's engaging in discussion about this subject, but the lying foreign magicians do discourse about it, that is, having abandoned the knowledge of the religious laws [Arab. *ʿilm al-sharāʿi*], they have created for themselves a substitute and entered into discussion about these *niflaʾot* [Heb. "miraculous things"] so that they may have a theological system [Arab. *kalaam*] and science [Arab. *ʿilm*] in accordance with which they may present their point of view. They have corrupted a great number of people by it, and even some of Israel have become occupied with their books and been ruined by them and had their faith [Arab. *ʿaqīda*] corrupted with respect to the foundations of their beliefs. Woe to anyone who is distracted by them from *Torat YHWH* ["the Torah of God"]!

Thus: "the eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear enough of hearing"—points out their extensiveness. The eye is not satisfied because of his knowledge that there are things which he has not seen, nor is the ear filled because of his knowledge that there are things that he has not heard. The reason for that is that the world is far-reaching and in this clime and country are things that exist nowhere else, so every people knows something about animals, herbs, and the like that no one else knows. Therefore he says: "the eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear enough of hearing."

It is best, however, to minimize the study of such things, since they are not among the things that are beneficial for life in the world to come. It is more important to devote oneself to God's Torah and his prophets' words, since these are the things that are profitable for the life in the world to come, as it is written: "Happy is the man who has not followed

the counsel of the wicked … rather, the teaching of the Lᴏʀᴅ is his delight …" (Ps 1:1–2).

<p style="text-align:center">Qoheleth 1:12</p>

I, Qoheleth, was king in Jerusalem over Israel.

I Qoheleth was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

He begins with: "I, Qoheleth"—this is because he intends to relate from his own experience everything to which he refers in what follows. "I, Qoheleth"—this shows that just as the editor [*al-mudawwin*] called him Qoheleth, so also he called himself Qoheleth. It is likely that it was he who first called himself Qoheleth, the editor following his example. He says: "I, Qoheleth, was"—without mentioning the name of his father, for if he had said son of David, it would have meant that his father had a part in some of the things he mentions. Or else he may have omitted it for the sake of brevity, relying upon the editor to supply it.

There is significance [Arab. *maʿna*] in his saying "I, Qoheleth, was king" rather than "I, Qoheleth, king of Israel," which is that he was king over Israel from the very start. In other words, its meaning is that from the time I became king over Israel, in Jerusalem I ruled—since he never ruled anywhere else, unlike David who ruled first in Hebron, then in Jerusalem. Supporting this interpretation, namely, "ever since the time I became king over Israel in Jerusalem," is: "I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom" (Qoh 1:13). Then his statement "I … was king" is a preface [Arab. *muqaddima*] to: "I set my mind" (Qoh 1:13).

In addition, it seems likely that he [Solomon] made this statement after Allah's word had reached him concerning the removal of the ʿ*aseret shebatim* [Heb. "Ten Tribes"] from his authority, Allah being upset with him because of the *nashim nokhriyot* [Heb. "foreign women"]. He felt remorse at that and began to practice abstention [Arab. *zuhd*] from worldly affairs and from power. It is as though he were relating to us the things he had been doing when he ruled by virtue of this strength and courage and his firm grasp of the kingship. He mentioned himself, the country over which he ruled, and the city in which he ruled; he was the one who was chosen from the sons of David, as it is written: "He chose my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord" (1 Chr 28:5); "you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples"

(Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2); and Jerusalem is chosen "more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Ps 87:2). He mentioned this in order to show that he was the most excellent of all men in station and had arrived at circumstances at which no one else had arrived. Nevertheless he turned his back on this world [Arab. *al-dunya*]. He gained nothing from it and remained full of remorse over the things in which he wearied himself, as he will make clear in what follows.

Qoheleth 4:17

Mind your steps [Heb. lit. *watch your foot*, according to the *qere*] *when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil.* [NRSV 5:1]

Guard your foot as when you go to the house of the Deity, and being near <u>to accept</u> [is better] than the fool's offering of a sacrifice; for they do not know [how] to do what is <u>forbidden</u>.

Know that Qoheleth, peace be upon him, did not keep this book entirely free from mention of the Law [Arab. *al-shar'*]. He mentioned it in three places. The first is here; the second is: "Go, eat your bread with gladness" (Qoh 9:7); and the third is at the end of the book. He did this in order to arouse the people to observe the Law [*al-shar'*] and hold fast to it. He mentioned this passage because it is similar to the preceding idea. That is to say, after he mentioned the disparity in the circumstances of people at different times—one time they may be in goodness and joy and another time in tribulation and sorrow—he then said: "Mind your steps when you go."

There are two points [Arab. *ma'nayn*] here. One is that he strongly warns the people against changing their religions even though their circumstances may have changed. Remember that in the case of Job, peace be upon him, his circumstances changed, but his faith in his religion did not change, as Scripture bears witness: "and he still keeps his integrity" (Job 2:3). The reason for this is that this world is not the Abode of Recompense, and we must not allow our devotions to change with a change in circumstances. The second idea is that the servant may derive help in improving his circumstances and his integrity by acts of devotion and vows, and as it is written: "call on me in the day of trouble and so on" (Ps 50:15 NRSV),

following the verse: "And pay your vows to the Most High" (Ps 50:14); also: "[vows] that my lips pronounced, that my mouth uttered in my distress" (Ps 66:14). For this reason he started this section immediately after the discourse which preceded it.

He says: "Watch your foot," not: "watch yourself [your *nephesh*]" as it is written elsewhere: "and watch yourselves scrupulously" (Deut 4:9), because he meant the foot by which a man is enabled to engage in travels, in the going and coming in pursuit of his livelihood, and in the rest of his affairs. Therefore he said: "watch your foot," and not "watch yourself." The meaning of "watch your foot" is that you should not walk in what Allah has forbidden, as it is written: "do not walk on the way of evil men" (Prov 4:14); "keep your feet from evil" (Prov 4:27), and the like.

He says: "when you go to the house of God"—this means, be continually on guard against sins just as you take precautions in the times when you go to the house of Allah, in times of pilgrimage [Arab. *al-ḥajj*], or in times required by obligation of sacrifices or vows. The meaning of this saying is that it is the nature of the righteous to examine thoroughly his affairs when it is time for him to go to the house of Allah. He does not go when he knows that there is some sin upon him, but only when he has no fault or guilt so that when he comes to the house of Allah and prays and calls upon him, Allah will accept him and fulfill his needs. Therefore he said: "when you go to the house of God."

He says: "and draw near to listen" [Heb. *ve-qarobh lishmoʿa*]—this means that Allah will be near to you in accepting your supplication, as it is written: "The Lord is near to all who call on Him and so on" (Ps 145:18).

He says: "sacrifice offered by fools [Heb. *kesilim*]"—he means that Allah accepts your request and supplication without sacrifice, but he does not accept the sacrifice of the fools, as he says: "(is better than) sacrifice offered by fools."

Then he says: "for they do not know"—making known the reason why Allah does not accept their sacrifice, even if it is satisfactory in its provisions. He said that Allah does not accept their sacrifice because they do not know what makes them pleasing in the sight of Allah. On the contrary, they are diligent in doing what is forbidden and shameful. This verse is like Jer 4:22, where it is said: "For my people are foolish." There they are called *ʾevilim* [Heb. "fools"] just as they are here called *kesilim*; there, he said: "they do not know me," and here: "they do not know"; there, he said: "they are skilled in doing evil," here: "to do evil" (all translations for this verse NRSV).

This "evil" includes every area of activity that Allah has forbidden, as it is written concerning the fathers who were coming to the house of Allah to offer their sacrifices and pray to him: "Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal" (Jer 7:9) and "then come and stand before Me in this House," and so on (Jer 7:10). To them the Lord said: "Add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat!" (Jer 7:21); and similarly: "Hear the word of the Lord, the chieftains of Sodom," and so on (Isa 1:10), "What need have I of all your sacrifices" (Isa 1:11), continuing to the end of that text [Arab. *qissa*].

Know that: "they do not know"—this means they are not learned and do not know [their] duty toward Allah, since they disregarded instruction and busied themselves without wisdom. For this reason they are continually doing what is forbidden.

In this verse the sage called attention to two things: first, that it is the duty of the people to be on guard against sins; second, that they acquire learning so that they may know their duty toward Allah, and that they not be like the fools who busy themselves apart from learning with the result that they carry on forbidden activities.

<center>Qoheleth 5:1</center>

Do not be rash [Heb. *ʾal tebhahel*] *with your mouth, and let not your heart be quick* [Heb. *ʾal yemaher*] *to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few* [Heb. *meʿatim*].

Do not be hasty with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a word before the Deity, for the Deity <u>possesses this world</u>, and you are on the earth; therefore <u>it is necessary</u> that your words be few <u>and brief</u>.

I have explained *ʾal tebhahel* as "do not make haste," as in: "and God has commanded me to hurry" (2 Chr 35:21 NRSV), "and hurriedly brought Haman" (Esth 6:14). It may also be translated as *dohsha* [Arab. "amazement," "perplexity"], as in: "a speedy riddance of all" (Zeph 1:18 KJV). Its meaning here is the same as *ʾal yemaher* [Heb. "let him not hurry"], but since *ʾal tebhahel* means the same thing as *ʾal yemaher*, and since he intended to mention two things (using the same idea), he said concerning the one *ʾal tebhahel* and concerning the other *ʾal yemaher* because it

is not proper for him to repeat the same word when it is ambiguous in the language.

He says: "Do not be rash with your mouth"—he means that if you are pondering something of those works of Allah which he causes to vary in his world as he wills, and if you do not understand the reason behind it, and if there should pass through your mind anything by way of questioning Allah concerning his works, take care that you not speak it lest you be held accountable for the thought and the word. This is similar to the verse: "if you have been a schemer, then clap your hand to your mouth" (Prov 30:32).

He says: "let not your heart be quick to bring out speech"—this follows: "do not be rash with your mouth," though its intent is the same, for one of two reasons: either because the first phrase concerns the general works of Allah in which that person and others partake, and the second concerns what happens specifically to that person by way of trials and tribulations, and Qoheleth forbids his saying a word, his statement referring to either case; or else the first may concern vicissitudes that occur from time to time in some of that person's affairs such as a loss or decrease in prestige or an objective or the death of a son, while the second applies to tribulations that pile up all at once on the order of what happened to Job. Therefore he said: If you see that your affairs have taken a turn against you, take care that you do not let your heart be hasty with a word which you may speak before Allah, lest he become displeased with you.

He says: "For God is in heaven"—this means he rules over [Heb. *ba-*] the heavens. Qoheleth wanted to mention the heavens because they encompass the earth and everything in it. Hence, the sense in this phrase is that Allah rules everything, his dominion is over everything: "and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps 103:19 NRSV); "you have dominion over all" (1 Chr 29:12). Therefore the greatest of the created things and the least are under his dominion.

He says: "and you are on earth"—this means that you are small and insignificant among his creations, since mankind itself is hardly mentionable in comparison with the multitude of his creations, as it is written: "What is man that you have been mindful of him" (Ps 8:5). How much less is a single individual among all the millions and myriads! Furthermore, you are on the earth, along with the created things and do not belong to the category of the exalted angels who have been endowed with a wisdom with which you have not been endowed. For this reason it is necessary that your words be few and brief. So do not question Allah concerning his works, but know your station and do not discuss things that are bigger and

too wonderous for you [Heb. *gedolot ve-niflaʾot mimekha*]. The explanation of this idea has already been discussed above.

He says *meʿatim* rather than *qetanim* [Heb. "few" rather than "small"] in order to inform us that it is expedient for a person to say less than he knows about something so that he does little speaking. If, however, he says more than he knows, then it is not well. Hence the sage warned that a man ought not to think about those things which are beyond his ken, for Allah did not create him for that and it is not among his activities, but if the thought should pass through his mind, he ought not to speak it.

Qoheleth 6:6

Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy [lit. *see*] *no good—do not all go to one place?* (NRSV)

Were a man to live a thousand years twice over, but good he does not see—is it not to one place that all go?

He has already said: "and live many years—no matter how many the days of his years may come to" (Qoh 6:3), a time span which is possible for people to live. Then he said: "even if he lived a thousand years twice." This is a span which is not possible for people to live, though Elijah, peace be upon him, has lived more than a thousand years twice over in the opinion of some scholars. That, however, does not belong in such contexts as this. He said: "a thousand years twice," though it would have been possible for him to say two thousand, because the first ten generations came close to a thousand years, as did Methuselah, but none of them exceeded a thousand years. Therefore he said: "a thousand years twice," meaning that if a man lived a thousand years, as did others, and then added a like number to them and still did not see good in any of them, he and the stillborn would be in the same situation.

Note that he said: "and his gullet is not sated through his wealth" (Qoh 6:3) and: "enjoy no good," in order to show that people should be satisfied by the good whenever they are set in the midst of it and see it. It is also possible that: "and his gullet is not sated through his wealth" (Qoh 6:3) may refer to the amenities of this world, while "enjoyed no good" refers to good works.

Then he said: "do not all go to one place"—which is similar to: "all turn to dust again" (Qoh 3:20 NRSV), though the latter is applied to both

man and beast while the former is applied to the stillborn and the rest of
mankind. Thus he declared that whoever has reached the age of respon-
sibility under the commandment ought to live comfortably in the Abode
of this World in the measure that the Creator has bestowed upon him,
and do good works. If he does not do this, there would be no difference
between him and the stillborn, for the stillborn did not find pleasure and
this person did not find pleasure. The stillborn, however, is better off than
he, as previously discussed.

<center>Qoheleth 12:12</center>

*A further word against them my son, be warned! The making of
many books is without limit. And much study* [Heb. *lahag harbeh*]
is a wearying of the flesh.

**And more than these, O my son, beware: the making of many
books has no limit <u>or end</u>, and much occupation is a burden to
the body.**

Having mentioned his and the other prophets' books, making known that
they, all of them, are "pleasing words" and "words of truth plainly" (Qoh
12:10 NRSV) and were received "by one shepherd" (Qoh 12:11), he now
warns the people against any other books possessed by the world, namely,
books of the philosophers and others in which the truth is thought to
reside, when in fact they are filled with nothing but propaganda relating to
and discourse about what no human should be drawn to. We already men-
tioned something of this at the book's beginning when speaking about the
verse: "I do not aspire to great things or to what is beyond me" (Ps 131:1).
Yet nevertheless the people do occupy themselves with their books. Thus
the sage, peace be with him, warned against being occupied with them or
laboring over them, as he says: "making books."
     There are two things [in the verse, that is, two proscriptions]. The first
is "making books"—it refers to being occupied with what they [the books]
say, for they are contrary to Torah; the second is "much study" [Heb. *lahag
harbeh*]—which refers to reading them and wasting one's time with them.
He also says "without limit" since their books have no end or limit, per-
haps because there are so many. Yet he adds an extra statement which
also teaches they are many; he says: "much, many" [Heb. *harbeh*]. Thus
the reason he says "without limit" is to teach that foreign books [Arab. *al-*

kutub al-barāniyya] have no end, that is, each one of them differs from the other without end, and likewise each teaches a science the end of which cannot be reached, for the works of the Creator, great and exalted is his mention, are too great to be encompassed, as we explained at: "no one can find out what is happening (Qoh 8:17 NRSV). This is why he says "without limit."

He then says "much study is a wearying of the flesh." The sage, peace be with him, teaches that occupation with them and wasting one's time with them burdens and weakens the body; nor does one even gain any benefit from it whatsoever in terms of rewards in this world or the hereafter. In contrast, "making books" with YHWH's words is something with benefit in this world and the next, as it is said: "recite it day and night, so that you may observe faithfully" (Josh 1:8). Since he commanded to read them and to labor over what is in them, he says: "only then you will prosper in your undertaking" (Josh 1:8). Thus the word of Allah, great and exalted, has benefit for anyone who is occupied with it and labors over what is in it. Wasting time with anything else has no benefit, as he says: "wearying of the flesh."

Solomon, peace be with him, mentions that they cause harm, as in the verse: "Do not add to His words, lest He indict you and you be proved a liar" (Prov 30:6). With this he alludes to those that discourse on the surface of the land and seas when they are certainly ignorant of it, as in the dictum: "Have you surveyed the expanses of the earth?" (Job 38:18); and as he says: "Have you penetrated the sources of the sea?" (Job 38:16). Even more significant is their discoursing on the spheres, saying that between each sphere is such and such, relating to hidden things that no one knows except their Creator, may his mention be exalted. It is incumbent upon us to reach only what is below him through his books in which his prophets give report. We ought not to discourse on anything contrary to or external to them lest we join those liable for punishment, as in the verse: "lest He indict you and you be proved a liar" (Prov 30:6). Now there is no doubt that the philosophers, as those among our *Ummah* [Arab. "nation"] that follow their words, are subject to punishment.

Woe to them that are distracted from the books of Allah, great and exalted, and his sayings, [led astray] by those which are other than them. About them he said [as can be read in Prov 9:14–18] "Woman Folly," and so on.

What he makes known is that the wise men of the foreign nations resemble the foolish whore who sits in the paths and, as the fools pass,

brings them into her. She has sweet and seductive speech, at least accord-
ing to its external appearance, while the ignorant masses fail to grasp her
true intent. She is: "Stolen waters are sweet" (Prov 9:17), after which he
said: "he does not know that the shades [Heb. *repha'im*] are there" (Prov
9:18). He teaches that anyone caught there is already caught in hell [*Gehen-
nam*], as he says: "her guests are in the depth of Sheol" (Prov 9:18).

Qoheleth, peace be with him, has collected in these verses everything
one needs to labor in, which is that the man ought to burden his soul in
words of the wise, which derive from one source. Be warned against occu-
pation with external books and occupation in reading them. One should
not labor in what is in them or believe them. This is why he says "and much
study" after "making many books."

> *Happy are those whose way is blameless.… Happy are those who
> observe His decrees.* (Ps 119:1–2)

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Sa'adia Gaon on Esther's Invitation of Haman:
A Case Study in Exegetical Innovation and Influence

Michael G. Wechsler

Introduction

While the seminal position of Sa'adia Gaon (882–942) in the history of Jewish Bible exegesis has long been affirmed in the subsequent scholarly tradition, medieval and modern alike, our understanding of the precise nature and scope of his contribution continues to grow with the ongoing publication of his works—both *editiones principes* and revised editions—and the many scholarly studies that they engender. Recently I had the privilege of contributing to the former corpus with the publication of Sa'adia's commentary on the book of Esther, reconstructed and edited from a total of sixty-three extant, separately-catalogued witnesses representing twenty-three distinct manuscripts. This commentary, which consists of a Judeo-Arabic translation (the first-known Arabic translation of the Hebrew text of Esther) and commentary proper, is entitled by him *Kitāb al-īnās bi-ʾl-jalwa* ("The Book of Conviviality in Exile") and appears to have been one of his latter works, composed circa 933–934.[1]

Like Sa'adia's other biblical commentaries and monographic works, *Kitāb al-īnās* is immediately distinguished by its innovative compositional structure. Following Arabic and Greco-Arabic compositional models, Sa'adia opens his commentary with a methodical introduction in which,

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1. As I discuss in the edition (Michael G. Wechsler, *The Book of Conviviality in Exile [Kitāb al-īnās bi-ʾl-jalwa]: The Judaeo-Arabic Translation and Commentary of Saadia Gaon on the Book of Esther*, Biblia Arabica 1 [Leiden: Brill, 2015], 3 n. 4), this title is intended by Sa'adia for the *combined* work of the biblical text (albeit in Arabic translation) and his commentary thereon. On the reasoning concerning this date of composition, see Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 4–5.

after an opening doxology, he discusses foundational themes in the book and the literary organization of these themes in the biblical text, and he also resolves certain theological cruxes. Following the introduction, Sa'adia arranges his commentary proper in seven sections corresponding to the thematic-literary structure outlined in his introduction. Within each section, moreover, Sa'adia organizes his commentary by pericope, first giving his Arabic translation of the pericope and then following this with his commentary thereon. Grammatical and lexical issues reflected in his translation are typically discussed by him—when he feels the need to do so—at the outset of his commentary on each pericope. Sa'adia's strongly didactic intent is clearly borne out at the end of each section, which he concludes with a concise enumeration of that section's "derivative points" (*shu'ab* or *furū'*, suggesting the terminology of Islamic *uṣūl al-fiqh*).[2] The personalized stamp of Sa'adia is also reflected throughout the commentary in his use of first-person forms (both singular and plural). This personalized and programmatic Graeco-Arabic compositional model—which Sa'adia is the first-known Jewish exegete to adopt (and adapt) for a commentary on Esther[3]—would have served his purpose well as the self-perceived steward of his people's intellectual and spiritual welfare (as he elaborates in *Sēfer ha-Gālūy*, his *apologia pro vita sua*)[4] by (1) helping to acclimate and

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2. I.e., the theoretical bases of Islamic law, in which the synonymous terms *shu'ab* and *furū'* (lit. "branches/limbs") signify the rules or principles that, while not themselves explicitly revealed in scriptural texts (*nuṣūṣ*), are derived from such by jurists in various ways including personal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and analogy (*qiyās*). See further Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 225 n. 166, and, on the influence of *uṣūl al-fiqh* on the Geonim generally, G. Libson, *Jewish and Islamic Law: A Comparative Study of Custom during the Geonic Period*, Harvard Series in Islamic Law 1 (Cambridge, MA: Islamic Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School, 2003).

3. Previous exegetical treatments of Esther, following the standard rabbinic-midrashic model, are *impersonal* in that they are anonymous compilations of named or unnamed rabbinic authorities (whose comments are often decontextualized and digressive), and they are *nonprogrammatic* in that they are typically organized around successive biblical lemmata rather than around a multilayered, literary-thematic plan, with subsidiary thematic pericopes informing one central theme (notwithstanding, in a few of these sources, the inclusion of theological proem intended to set the venue of coming affliction counterbalanced by God's faithful solicitude for Israel—as in Midrash Esther Rabbah).

4. See A. E. (A. Ya.) Harkavy, ed. "The Surviving Remnants of R. Saadia's *Sēfer hā-Gālūy*" [Hebrew], in *Leben und Werke des Saadjah Gaon (Said al-Fajjumi, 892– 942), Rectors der Talmudischen Akademie in Sora*, part 5 of *Studien und Mittheilungen*

so facilitate the interaction and "convivializing" of his Jewish readership with their Islamicate literary and intellectual culture, and (2) providing his Rabbanite readership with a viable intellectual counterpart to the similar, competing literary models being adopted by Karaite exegetes.

Beyond these noteworthy aspects of compositional innovation, Sa'adia's commentary on Esther exhibits a wealth of content attesting not only to his originality and creativity as an exegete, but also to his influence upon subsequent Jewish exegesis of this vastly popular biblical book.[5] In addition to the few initial steps that have recently been taken in exploring this wealth of content,[6] let me ask the reader now to join in taking one more as we consider three specific facets of innovation and influence centered in Sa'adia's comment concerning Esther's invitation of Haman to her two banquets (Esth 5:4–8).

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aus der Kaiserlichen Oeffentlichen Bibliothek zu St. Petersburg (Saint Petersburg: Tipo-Litografiya Bermana i Rabinovicha, 1891), 154; Michael G. Wechsler, "Saadia's Seven Guidelines for 'Conviviality in Exile' (from His Commentary on Esther)," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 1 (2013): 205.

5. Vastly popular, that is, in Jewish tradition: cf. B. D. Walfish, *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); A. Koller, *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and the diachronic survey of Esther in Judaism contained in the articles found in *EBR* 8:13–30. In Christian tradition, generally speaking, the attitude toward this book is far more reserved: see E. Horowitz, "Esther (Book and Person): III.A. Christianity: Patristics and Western Christianity," *EBR* 8:30–34; and Michael G. Wechsler, "Esther (Book and Person): III.B. Christianity: Near-Eastern Christianity," *EBR* 8:34–38.

6. See, in addition to our introductory discussion in *Conviviality*, 6–29, and the discursive material in our footnotes to the English translation (*Conviviality*, 93–416), Michael G. Wechsler, "Ten Newly Identified Fragments of Saadia's Commentary on Esther: Introduction and Translation," in *Pesher Naḥum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, Presented to Norman (Naḥum) Golb*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Michael G. Wechsler, with the participation of Fred Donner, Joshua Holo, and Dennis Pardee, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 66 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012), 240–43; Wechsler, "Guidelines"; Wechsler, "New Data from Saadia bearing on the Relocation of the Palestinian Yeshiva to Jerusalem." *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 12 (2013):1–9; and my unpublished paper "Innovative Aspects of Saadia Gaon's Judaeo-Arabic Translation and Commentary on the Book of Esther" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 21 November 2015).

On Esther's Invitation of Haman (from Saʿadia's Commentary on Esther)

The following excerpt is taken from Saʿadia's larger comment on Esth 5:1–14 and, except for a few slight changes, is identical to my translation in *Conviviality*, pages 296–302.

Now, among those things for which a reason must be sought is Esther's invitation of Haman, for insofar as she had in mind the deliverance of her people, then why did she invite their enemy to her reception? For this we can discern in fact several possible reasons, (1) the first of which was so that she might augment (Haman's) standing[7] and treat him as an equal of the king, in order that such might become the cause of his demise—for in the case of anyone who attains perfection, there is nothing left thereafter except for his decline—consistent with the sense of (the statement) משגיא לגוים ויאבדם (Job 12:23), which may possibly be interpreted, "Who causes (the nations) to become a multitude and then destroys them."[8] And (Haman) himself was, in fact, beguiled by this, for so he says: *Moreover, Queen Esther invited no one else along with the king to the reception*, etc. (5:12), and in his view this was equivalent to[9] *the magnitude of his wealth and the multitude of his sons* (5:11), since he singles it out with its own special statement.[10] (2) Another possible reason[11] was to show

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7. Or "(self-)importance" (Arab. *miqdār*, on which see Joshau Blau, *A Dictionary of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2006), 531a.

8. Saʿadia's tentative qualification of this interpretation (Arab. *yumkinu an yufassaru*) is consistent with the fact that he construes the Hebrew clause in Job differently in his translation of that book—i.e.: "The one who displaces tribes and then destroys them" (Saʿadia, *Job*, 87), in which he connects משגיא to the root סוג (which he also renders by another root *ad* Pss 53:4; 80:19, albeit in his *Egrōn*, s.v. סג: זאיל), rather than, as in the present instance, to the root שׂגה/ס (as in his *Egrōn*, s.v. סגיא: כתיר). See also the citation of this verse with reference to Haman's rise and fall in Esth. Rab. 7:2 (*ad* Esth 3:1).

9. "Equivalent to"—Arab. *maqām*, on this sense of which see Blau, *Dictionary*, 576b.

10. "He singles … statement"—or, more literally: "set apart for it a statement of its own" (Arab. *farrada lahu qawlᵃⁿ ʿalā ḥaddihi*; cf. Blau, *Dictionary*, 494b); i.e., Esther's invitation of Haman with the king is the sole focus of the two clauses in v. 12, whereas "*the magnitude of his wealth and the multitude of his sons*" is presented by him as one in a series of items (i.e., direct objects introduced by את) in the single clause comprising v. 11.

11. "Another possible reason"—so, in the interest of clarity, for Arab. *thumma* (lit. "moreover," "furthermore"), as also when introducing the remaining possibili-

him kindness and to treat him honorably, for so long as one treats his enemy honorably, he is like one who strews coals of fire on his head by comparison [...], as it says, (*If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat*, etc.;) *for thou wilt heap coals of fire upon his head* (Prov 25:21–22). (3) Another possible reason was to keep him planted close to her lest she (appear to) be averse to him and he [...][12] wealth and power, and he thereby appeal (to others) for help and rebel against Ahasuerus, and so depart and slip out of her hand and out of the king's hand. (4) Another possible reason was to augment her self-abasement so that God would regard her as being just as subdued as one who was distressed and had suffered harm, as (borne out by her) acting subserviently to[13] (Haman) and treating him jointly just like the king. (5) Another possible reason was so that he might not discern that she was a Jew, for such is the practice of those who are perspicacious[14] among the people to remove what they wish to conceal far away from (the rest of) the people.[15] (6) Another possible reason was to make the sons of Israel despair of her in the event that they had come to place their confidence in her, that she, to the exclusion of their Lord, was the one attending to their situation. Hence, rather than being delivered, when they heard that she had invited (Haman) to her reception they would have said, "Our eyes have been fixed upon this person, yet since she has shown herself to be favorably inclined towards our enemy with her own personal charity, there is nothing left for us but to turn to the Lord and put our confidence in Him alone." (7) Another reason, possibly, was so that the king might come to suspect that she and Haman had devised a plot against him, whereupon they would be

ties below (albeit for the seventh, we have rendered it simply "another reason," since Sa'adia there adds explicitly *fī ʾl-imkān*).

12. Notwithstanding this lacuna, Sa'adia's point is clear from what follows—viz., that were Haman not preoccupied by the queen's receptions, he might discern the queen's intention and so make use of his power and wealth to secure protection and foment rebellion (cf. the third reason in the excerpt from b. Meg. 15b below).

13. Or "humbling/humiliating herself before" (Arab. *mustakhdhiya ʿindahu*, on which cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 20 vols. in 10 (Cairo [Būlāq]: Al-Matbaʿat al-Kubrā al-Mīriyya bi-Būlāq, 1882–1891), 18:246. Her humiliation/subservience lay in the fact that, by inviting Haman to the feast that *she* had prepared (see 5:4, 8, 12; 6:14), she was effectively according him the treatment due only to her superior, the king.

14. Or, perhaps, "meticulous" (Arab. *ḥudhdhāq*).

15. Sa'adia's point here, apparently, is that Esther "removed" far away from herself any evidence of the anxiety and grief that she felt on behalf of her people (from which Haman might infer her Jewishness) by focusing her actions on doing that which would give the opposite impression (cf. also the eighth reason given in the Byzantine Karaite Compilation cited below).

executed together and the decree would be annulled, though she did not have in mind the annulment of the[16] […]. (8) Another possible reason was because the king was fickle and she wanted to be sure that he would respond positively to her […], whereupon (the king) would demand of him […], and so she ensured that (Haman) was present so that the blow might fall upon him at the same time that the king gave the order.

Such is what has come to our mind of the possible reasons for Esther's invitation of Haman, and it may be that it was for some of these, or for all of them—and (ultimately) for that which would prove most fitting—that Esther deemed it right to invite Haman. Indeed, it is one of those commonly-understood things that a person may undertake an action and it be deemed right by him for many reasons, as (in the case of) one who says, "I consider it right that I go forth to Jerusalem[17] in order that I might acquire merit,[18] and that I might meet the scholars, and that I might […], and that I might amass[19] its sweet fruits, and that I might exhibit my reliance on God to keep me safe during the journey, and that I might be absented for a time from those who annoy me; and so too, (that) if I should die, then I will be buried there"—and for whatever else he might add to these exemplary reasons and others like them.

Discussion

Repackaging Rabbinic Tradition

Sa'adia's attitude toward rabbinic tradition, as well noted elsewhere, is a nuanced one.[20] On the one hand, toward halakhic tradition (that is, the

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16. "Though she … the"—a tentative translation vis-à-vis the following lacuna.

17. Arabic *bayt al-maqdis* (probably abbreviated from *madīnat bayt al-maqdis*, "the city of the temple"). On this common designation of Jerusalem see, among others, M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099*, trans. E. Broido (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 114 (§125) and his full note thereto, as well as the rich collection of sources supplied by M. A. Friedman, *Jewish Polygyny in the Middle Ages: New Documents from the Cairo Geniza* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1986), 25–53 n. 28.

18. I.e., merit in God's eyes for making the pilgrimage.

19. "That I might amass"—Arab. *li-astakthira min*, on which see R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill; Paris: Maisonneuve frères, 1927), 2:445a; as well as Sa'adia's translation of Prov 22:16a, עשק דל להרבות לו, construed as a protasis: "Whosoever wrongfully takes from a poor man to amass (more) for himself"; see Sa'adia, *Proverbs*, 173.

20. See, among others, Haggai Ben-Shammai, "The Rabbinic Literature in Se'adyā's Exegesis: Between Tradition and Innovation" [Hebrew], in *Heritage and*

oral law) he maintains an unquestioning allegiance, rooted in the rabbinic dogma of the oral law as an extrabiblical corpus of reliable tradition, faithfully handed down from the prophets who received it from God.[21] Hence, in the extant text of his commentary on Esther we find eight direct halakhic citations (three from the Mishnah, four from the Babylonian Talmud, and one from the Jerusalem Talmud),[22] all presented by Saʿadia as prescriptive and consistent with the positive behavior of the Jewish protagonists in the biblical text. Toward aggadic-midrashic tradition, on the other hand, Saʿadia exhibits a critical and independently analytical attitude, according to which a given interpretation might, vis-à-vis the perceived constraints of reason, be rejected or endorsed with varying degrees of reservation. A clear example of this latter attitude is afforded by the following excerpt, the bulk of which consists of a reworked paraphrase of the following aggadic-midrashic exegetical tradition in b. Meg. 15b:[23]

Innovation in Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Culture: Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies, ed. J. Blau and D. Doron (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 33–69; R. Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 312–15; Brody, *Saʿadyah Gaon*, trans. B. Rosenberg (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 73–78; Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 11–20; M. Zucker, ed., *Saadya's Commentary on Genesis* [Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984), 13–18.

21. See m. Avot 1:1, the *locus classicus* for this dogma, as well as the following statement from Saʿadia's polemic work *Taḥṣīl al-qiyās fi ʾl-sharāʾiʿ al-samʿiyya* (per Zucker, *Genesis*, xiii n. 9): "This (following) discussion [i.e., the second part of *Taḥṣīl al-qiyās*] is intended to affirm the transmitted tradition … known (to us) from the Mishnah and the Talmud: To begin, I aver that the fundamentals of the law have come to us in the same way that they came to our forebears (who saw the deeds and heard the words of the prophets)—by way of sense perception (Arab. *al-ḥiss*)—and they in turn handed them down to us. It is in this same way that the (specific) laws prescribed (from these fundamentals) came to us: based on the knowledge acquired by our forefathers by means of sense perception. And insofar as there is no need for us in this book to explain sense perception, since it is self-evident, … so too, therefore, is there no need for us to explain how (halakhic) tradition came about, since it is self-evident."

22. This last, brief citation, concerning the "the twenty-four (benedictions) of fasts" (see y. Ber. 4:3 [33b]; y. Taʿan. 2:2 [9b]) and found at the end of his comment on 4:1–4, bears out Saʿadia's additionally innovative role as the first of the Geonim to cite the Jerusalem Talmud as a source of halakhic authority (see further Brody, *Geonim*, 166–69, 240–41).

23. Here given per the translation in M. Simon, "Megillah: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices," in *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Moʿed*, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino, n.d.), 4:92–93 (with some slight adjustments).

> Our Rabbis taught: What was Esther's reason for inviting Haman? (1) R. Eleazar said: She set a trap for him, as it says, *Let their table before them become a snare* (Ps 69:23). (2) R. Joshua said: She learnt to do so from her father's house, as it says, *If thine enemy be hungry give him bread to eat*, etc. (Prov 25:21–22). (3) R. Meir said: So that he should not form a conspiracy and rebel. (4) R. Judah said: So that they should not discover that she was a Jewess. (5) R. Nehemiah said: So that Israel should not say, "We have a sister in the palace," and so should neglect (to pray for) mercy. (6) R. Jose said: So that he should always be at hand for her. (7) R. Simeon b. Menassiah said: (She thought), "Perhaps the Omnipresent will notice and do a miracle for us." (8) R. Joshua b. Korḥa said: (She thought), "I will encourage him so that he may be killed, both he and I." (9) Rabban Gamaliel said: (She thought), "Ahasuerus is a changeable king." (10) Said R. Gamaliel: We still require the Modean, as it has been taught: R. Eliezer of Modiʿim says: She made the king jealous of him and she made the princes jealous of him. (11) Rabbah said: (She thought), "*Pride goeth before destruction*" (Prov 16:18). Abaye and Raba gave the same reason, saying: (She thought), "*With their poison I will prepare their feast*" (Jer 51:39).
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> Rabbah b. Abbuha came across Elijah and said to him: Which of these reasons prompted Esther to act as she did? He replied: (All) the reasons given by all the Tannaim and all the Amoraim.

When one compares this talmudic passage to the reasons enumerated by Saʿadia in his comment, it becomes apparent that, beyond simply paraphrasing the former, Saʿadia also takes the liberty to make more substantive *editorial* changes: he omits any mention of the rabbinic authorities associated with each reason and he also reorganizes the reasons, slightly changing their order and combining a few closely-related pairs into one. This reorganization may be summarily illustrated by the following table, in which the reasons as presented by Saʿadia are juxtaposed with the corresponding reasons in b. Meg. 15b (per our parenthetical enumeration of the reasons in each excerpt above):

Saʿadia	b. Meg.
1	1(?)/11
2	2
3	3
4	7
5	4
6	5

7   8/10
8   6/9

By making these more substantive editorial changes to the rabbinic tradition, as well as by presenting such through the medium of vernacular Arabic paraphrase, Saʿadia is able to disassociate the tradition from its canonically-imbued expression in the Talmud. This critical, noncitative "repackaging" of aggadic-midrashic tradition is characteristic of Saʿadia's exegetical writing and bears out—beyond the more general accretive-communal nature of medieval Judeo-Arabic exegesis[24]—two interrelated concerns that qualify almost the entirety of Saʿadia's literary activity: (1) refuting and forestalling, as far as possible, Karaite criticism of rabbinic-Rabbanite tradition *qua* rabbinic tradition (regardless of any rational or scriptural merit); and (2) reestablishing the Bible's preeminent position within the literary-canonical hierarchy of Judaism (in which, by Saʿadia's day, it had become relegated to the practical periphery).[25] In keeping with the former concern, the critically modified content of the aggadic-midrashic tradition is presented squarely on its own terms, rather than by association to a canonical rabbinic source or individual rabbinic authorities, as a rationally valid explanation—and one which is in this case further corroborated, as Saʿadia points out in the latter part of his comment, by both psychological truism ("Indeed, it is one of those commonly-understood things …") and social *realia* ("as [in the case of] one who says …"). Any potential (or actual) Karaite criticism of the reworked tradition *qua* a rabbinic tradition—even if Karaite scholars were able to discern the basis for Saʿadia's comment in the traditional source material—is thus largely neutralized. And, in keeping with the latter concern, Saʿadia's presentation of the reworked tradition through the medium of vernacular Arabic paraphrase serves not only to disassociate that tradition from its canonically-imbued talmudic/rabbinic expression in Hebrew

24. See, among others, I. Goldziher, *Studien über Tanchûm Jerûschalmi* (Leipzig: List & Franke, 1870), 3–4, as well as our more extended discussion of this "accretive-communal" (certainly not "plagiaristic" in the modern/unethical sense) approach to exegesis in the commentaries of Saʿadia's devotee Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi (d. 1291), in Michael G. Wechsler, *Strangers in the Land: The Judaeo-Arabic Exegesis of Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi on the Books of Ruth and Esther*, Magnes Bible Studies (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010), 54–66.

25. See Brody, *Geonim*, 241–42; Brody, *Saʾadyah*, 58–73; R. Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* [Hebrew], Literature, Meaning, Culture 17 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hameʾuchad, 1988), 156–64.

and Aramaic, but also to emphasize and augment the contrasting presence and authoritative position of any scriptural prooftexts, which, unlike the nonscriptural textual elements of the tradition, are consistently retained by Saʿadia in their precise canonical (Hebrew) form (notwithstanding that in the present example only one of the four scriptural prooftexts given by Saʿadia is carried over from the talmudic source—i.e., Prov 25:21–22—and even then Saʿadia cites the latter rather than the former part of the biblical prooftext, perhaps to further disassociate his comment from its aggadic-midrashic source).

As a Source of Contemporary Realia and Social History

At various points throughout his commentary on Esther, Saʿadia draws upon contemporary *realia* to further elucidate and/or substantiate the meaning of the biblical text.[26] Hence, whether citing the contemporary dissimulation of Jews and Christians in the service of Muslims to illustrate the prudence of Esther's initial dissimulation in the palace,[27] or the worship of the Khazarian Khaqan by his people as well as of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib by certain Muslims in the Maghrib to illustrate the plausibility of Haman also being intended as an object of worship (3:2),[28] Saʿadia presents the reader with information relevant not only for the study of exegetical history, but also for the study of social history.

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26. The discussion in this section represents an abridged and updated version of Wechsler, "New Data."

27. From his comment on 2:16–20 (Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 206–7): "The juxtaposition of (the clause) *Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate* (v. 19b) with *Esther would not make known her kindred* means to say that, even though Esther had provided Mordecai with an official position in the ruler's household, she still did not reveal the identity of her people. Indeed, she conducted herself just like many Jews and Christians (in our time) whom we see devoting themselves to the service of Muslims; it is thus that one must view her."

28. From his comment on 3:1–5 (Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 218–19): "It may then be asked: Was it truly among the customs of the people to set up for themselves a man whom they would worship? And we would respond by saying this: Before the man of the best qualities among them they do indeed prostrate themselves and worship him, and call him by the name Khaqān—notwithstanding that they set up another one (in his place) as time goes on. It has also been said that in the Maghrib is a region whose people have been worshipping Abbāʾ ʿĀfir [= Abū Turāb, a soubriquet for ʿAlī] and his progeny over the course of time. The situation regarding Haman may thus have transpired in much the same fashion."

So also in the present excerpt: to underscore the general plausibility of Esther having multiple reasons for her invitation as expressed in the reworked aggadic-midrashic tradition, he appeals first to a psychological truism ("it is one of those commonly-understood things that a person may undertake an action and it be deemed right by him for many reasons"); and then follows this with the specific (albeit hypothetical) example, ostensibly drawn from the *realia* of contemporary Jewish social life, of the multiple reasons that a Jewish man in Sa'adia's day might have for making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, designated by Sa'adia in Arabic as *bayt al-maqdis*.[29] In describing this scenario, significantly, Sa'adia provides information which may in turn contribute to a more refined understanding of the time at which the Palestinian *yeshiva* was relocated (either from Ramla or Tiberias) to Jerusalem, the *terminus ad quem* of which event has previously been placed at circa 960 CE.[30]

The information in question hinges specifically on two expressions, the first of which is *bayt al-maqdis*, an Arabic calque of the Hebrew expression *bēt ha-miqdāsh*. Though this former phrase is also attested in medieval sources as a designation of the contemporary temple mount as well as of Palestine in general, its usual reference is either to the biblical temple or to Jerusalem.[31] This is certainly so in Sa'adia's usage: in particu-

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29. On this phrase, see n. 17 above.

30. This being the approximate date when the letter of King Joseph of Khazaria to Ḥasday ibn Shaprūṭ was composed, in which express reference is made to "the yeshiva that is in Jerusalem" (הישיבה שבירושלם); see Gil, *Palestine*, 499–500 (§738), positing a relocation from Tiberius. The relocation from Ramla, on the other hand, is entailed by the proposals of J. Mann (*The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fātimid Caliphs: A Contribution to Their Political and Communal History Based Chiefly on Genizah Material Hitherto Unpublished* [repr., New York: Ktav, 1970], 1:59, 65) and B. Z. Kedar ("When Did the Palestinian Yeshiva Leave Tiberias?," in *Pesher Naḥum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity through the Middle Ages, Presented to Norman [Naḥum] Golb*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer and Michael G. Wechsler, with the participation of Fred Donner, Joshua Holo, and Dennis Pardee, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 66 [Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012], 117–20), who place the *yeshiva* there in the late ninth or early tenth century (though neither scholar addresses the bearing of King Joseph's reference upon a subsequent relocation to Jerusalem).

31. See the richly documented discussion of Gil, *Palestine*, 114 (§125) and n. 38. One point of his, however, we would call into question (which he reiterates on p. 788 [§924])—viz., that the Karaite Sahl ben Maṣliaḥ "evidently means Palestine" when, in his letter to Sa'adia's disciple Jacob ben Samuel, he says "I have come from *bēt*

lar, as regards the present passage, of the ten other occurrences of this phrase in the extant text of his commentary on Esther, *all* of them are clearly delineated by context as references either to the biblical temple[32] or to Jerusalem.[33] Consistent with this observation, *bayt al-maqdis* in the present passage is best understood as a designation of contemporaneous Jerusalem (certainly not the temple mount, which would hardly constitute an expected venue at which to "meet the scholars").

The second key expression is *al-ʿulamāʾ* ("the scholars/sages"), by which Saʿadia typically designates the collective intellectual authorities of the time.[34] Since he uses the term here without further qualification—other than that they are to be met with in *bayt al-maqdis* (= Jerusalem)—it seems to us most reasonable to construe this as a reference to the collective scholars of the *yeshiva*. Indeed, in Saʿadia's usage the unqualified, definite honorific *al-ʿulamāʾ* is semantically equivalent to Hebrew *ha-ḥăkhāmīm*, by which latter he typically designates the collective of authorized scholars of the *yeshivot*.[35]

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ha-miqdāsh to issue a warning …" (see S. Pinsker, *Lickute Kadmoniot: Zur Geschichte des Karaismus und der karäischen Literatur* [Hebrew] [Vienna: Adalbert della Torre, 1860], 2:30 [second par.], as earlier on p. 27 [last par.]). In fact it would make eminent sense that he means Jerusalem (so J. Mann, *Karaitica*, vol. 2 of *Texts and Studies* [Philadelphia: Hebrew Press of the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1935], 22), which was his primary residence and where he was active within the prominent Karaite circle of "the teachers of the émigrés to Jerusalem" (Arab. *muʿallimu ʾl-maqādisa*). Cf. also Friedman, *Polygyny*, 252–53 n. 28.

32. E.g., in his commentary on 3:6–15 (Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 241): "In Tishri their kingdom was revitalized by the consecration of the Temple (*bayt al-maqdis*) in the time of Solomon, as it says, *Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel*, (etc.) (1 Kgs 8:1)." The other uses of this phrase as a designation of the temple are found in his commentary on 1:3–4 (once); 3:1–5 (once); and 3:6–15 (once). The phrase also occurs once each in his commentary on 8:1–14 and on 9:1–19, where it may refer either to the temple or to Jerusalem—though certainly not to Palestine.

33. E.g., in his commentary on 1:3–4 (Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 137): "The starting date (of the 70-year exile) was at the end of (Nebuchadnezzar's) conquest of Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*)—consistent with what Daniel says, *to accomplish the desolations of Jerusalem, seventy years*, etc. [Dan 9:2]"). The other uses of this phrase as a designation of Jerusalem are likewise found in his commentary on 1:3–4 (five times), in addition to the two ambiguous uses remarked in the previous note.

34. I.e., of his or any previous time; cf., e.g., Saʿadia, *Proverbs*, 244 (on Prov 30:1). For the collective authorities of bygone ages—except for those of his own (i.e., the geonic) age—Saʿadia also uses, apparently interchangeably, the terms *awāʾil/awwalūn*.

35. See Saʿadia, *Egrōn*, 223; and H. L. Bornstein, "The Controversy between Rabbi

Hence, if our reasoning is correct, Sa'adia's exegetically oriented anecdote offers us historical evidence of the *yeshiva*'s existence in Jerusalem by at least September 942, when Sa'adia died. If, moreover, Sa'adia's *Sēfer ha-Gālūy* was indeed his last work, the final version of which was composed between 935 and 936,[36] then the *terminus ad quem* of our evidence from his commentary on Esther—which was composed before his commentary on Daniel[37]—may be reasonably pushed back to 933/934. Though this revised date point certainly does not preclude the possibility of a prior relocation to Ramla (per the theories of Jacob Mann and Benjamin Kedar),[38] it does lead us to wonder whether, if the *yeshiva* did in fact relocate to Ramla toward the turn of the century, it was intended only as a *transitional* relocation before the final move to Jerusalem—the desirability of which destination is at any rate clearly expressed by the Gaon of the Palestinian *yeshiva* himself, Aaron b. Meir, in a letter written around the time of his calendar dispute with Sa'adia, ca. 921/922: "The glory of Israel is naught but Jerusalem, the Holy City, and the Great Sanhedrin therein, for so our sages of blessed memory have taught: 'He who has never beheld the joy of the Bēt ha-Shō'ēvā has never beheld joy in his life (m. Sukkah 5.1).'"[39]

Sa'adia Gaon and Ben Meir" [Hebrew], in *Sefer ha-Yovel le-Nahum Sokolov* (Warsaw: Shuldberg, 1903–1904), 75, lines 10–15. Though unlikely in my view, the possibility cannot be absolutely dismissed that Sa'adia is referring to a nonspecific collective of scholars in Jerusalem.

36. See Harkavy, "Surviving Remnants," 147; H. Malter, *Saadia Gaon—His Life and Works*, The Morris Loeb Series 1 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942), 269; E. Schlossberg, "Concepts and Methods in the Commentary of R. Saadia Gaon on the Book of Daniel" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1988), 45, 65 n. 1.

37. See Sa'adia, *Daniel*, 57 (on Dan 2:46); p. 140 (on Dan 7:17–18); p. 163 (on Dan 9:2–3); and again there.

38. See above.

39. Bornstein, "Controversy," 62, lines 1–3. The reference by Sahl ben Matsliaḥ, writing in the second half of the tenth century to "the students of the Rabbanites on the Holy Mountain and in Ramla" (Pinsker, *Kadmoniot*, 2:33, second par., line 1)—if indeed a reference to yeshiva students (so Mann, *Palestine*, 65) and not Rabbanites in general (so, apparently, Gil, *Palestine*, 802, n. 15 [§931], 811 [§937])—may attest to a small holdover of the *yeshiva*'s presence in Ramla, following its relocation *magnam partem* to Jerusalem (not dissimilar, perhaps, from the scenario of a present-day college's main campus, where the administration and most of its facilities are situated, and its much smaller extension site in another location).

Influence on Later Karaite Exegesis

As regards the literary interplay between Saʿadia and the Karaites, schol-
ars have tended to focus on the polemical aspect, and understandably so,
given that refuting the Karaite threat was a central concern for Saʿadia; and
that the degree to which he addressed this threat in his writing—contra the
sparse attention paid to the Ananite-Karaite conglomerate by the preced-
ing Geonim[40]—secured his status as a favored literary opponent of Karaite
polemicists for many generations thereafter. In view of the scholarly focus
on this often fierce polemical interplay, one might well conclude that the
Karaites would have found little value in anything that Saʿadia wrote; yet
this would be a mistake. Just as in our day, so too in that of Saʿadia, a
scholar might engage in strongly polemical literary language with another
scholar on points of deep disagreement, yet elsewhere cite the work of
that same scholar with approbation where they agree. And, indeed, my
nearly two decades of research on Judeo-Arabic and Karaite exegesis of the
book of Esther has borne out that this is precisely the case with regard to
Karaite engagement with Saʿadia's commentary, various aspects of which
are incorporated (usually noncitatively) not only as viable exegetical
options, but even endorsed ones. One of Saʿadia's fiercest Karaite literary
opponents, Salmon ben Yerūḥim (mid-tenth century), in fact admits at
one point in his own commentary on Esther (*ad* 5:14), after citing—albeit
without express attribution—Saʿadia's application of Ps 7:16 to the scenario
in Esther (found at the end of Saʿadia's comment on 5:1–14), that "in his
commentary there is indeed benefit for those who are educated."[41]

    With reference to the present excerpt, there is nothing we can see in the
Judeo-Arabic commentaries of subsequent Karaite exegetes in the tenth–
eleventh centuries that would indicate *express* influence by or borrowing
from Saʿadia—though the latter's commentary on Esther was available and

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40. At least per the extant sources, according to which the only certain polemical
references were made by Naṭrūnai ben Hillai (Gaon of Sura, 853–861) and Hayy ben
David (Gaon of Pumbedita, 889–896); see David E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Ḥofni Gaon
and His Cultural World: Texts and Studies*, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 18 (Leiden:
Brill, 1996), 76–77 (on the range of their gaonates see M. Gil, ed., *In the Kingdom of
Ishmael* [Hebrew], 4 vols., Publications of the Diaspora Research Institute 117–120
[Tel Aviv: Mosad Bialik, 1997], 1:319–22, 336–37 [§§197–98, 206]).

41. For both the text and translation of the fuller comment see Wechsler, *Convivi-
ality*, 304 n. 131.

known to these Karaite exegetes and undoubtedly contributed, if only in a general accretive sense, to the intellectual backdrop against which they coalesced and formed their own personalized views on the point in question. Hence—and unsurprisingly given the Karaite rationalist aversion to exegetical polysemy (even though the issue is specifically one of multiple *reasons* for what the text describes rather than multiple *meanings* of the text itself)—the two known Karaite exegetes of this period, from whom we have an extant comment on this passage, advance only a single reason for Esther's invitation of Haman. Thus Salmon ben Yerūḥim, presenting the combined equivalent of Sa'adia's third and eighth reasons:

> As to her summoning Haman and inviting him along with the king— (this was) in order that he not elude her, her specific intention thereby being that he not escape. Yet had she spoken (of this) to the sovereign in his royal court, someone may possibly have interceded for (Haman) or helped him to escape, whereas her keeping him close at hand was to ensure that the matter not be delayed and that, when the king's anger flared up, the blow would fall quickly upon (Haman).[42]

And Yefet ben 'Eli (late tenth century), presenting a more concise equivalent of Sa'adia's third reason: "She invited Haman in order to keep him close to her, for had he not been present with her he might have been able to slip out of her hand."[43]

Moving on to the realm of Hebrew Karaite exegesis in Byzantium, on the other hand, we find clear evidence of the profound degree to which Sa'adia's exegesis was valued and incorporated into the Karaite exegetical tradition. This evidence, which derives from the earliest, formative period of Byzantine Karaism (eleventh–twelfth centuries), is found in an as-yet unpublished anonymous commentary on Esther, replete with Byzantine Greek glosses, which (as has already been recognized concerning the commentary on Ruth in the same manuscript) is clearly the source epitomized by the Karaite scholar Jacob ben Reuben (late eleventh–early twelfth cen-

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42. Per MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 2:110, fol. 6r (*ad* Esth 5:5), cited in Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 300.

43. See Michael G. Wechsler, ed., *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ʿEli the Karaite on the Book of Esther: Edition, Translation, and Introduction*, Karaite Texts and Studies 1, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 44*/271. For a preliminary assessment of Sa'adia's influence on Yefet's Esther commentary, and more definitive examples, see there, 66–71.

tury) for his much briefer commentary on the book in *Sēfer hā-ʿōsher*.[44]
In this anonymous Hebrew commentary on Esther—which is in fact an
exegetical compilation of translated selections drawn primarily from
the Arabic commentaries of Salmon ben Yerūḥim, Yefet ben ʿEli, and, *to
an even greater degree*, Saʿadia—we find, loosely translated into Hebrew,
what is unmistakably the Gaon's reworked Arabic version of the aggadic-
midrashic exegetical tradition, cited above, concerning the reasons for
Esther's invitation of Haman, enumerating the same eight reasons, and in
the same order (excepting Saʿadia's fifth reason, which is presented last):

> (Scripture) indicates that Esther prepared (another) banquet and (again)
> invited Haman together with the king. Now, as to (her reasons for doing)
> this, there are eight explanations: (1) First, to make him seem equal
> to the king—as if to say, "Should I invite the king and not also invite
> you?!"—which situation would then become the end and demise of his
> eminence, for though she honored him up to heaven, (the Lord) would
> cast him down to the earth; yet this fool, being gullible, said, *Moreover,
> (Queen Esther) invited no one else*, etc. (5:12)—which matter we have
> already explained. (2) Second, because this feast was a cause for rejoicing
> to Haman, and Esther was therefore treating him in a manner consistent
> with what Scripture says, *for thou wilt heap coals of fire*, etc. (Prov 25:
> 22). (3) Third, to exhibit to him (the sentiment) "I favor you" so as not to
> reveal to him her enmity, since the king did not (yet) know, for she had
> not (yet) told him anything about Haman so that no one (would find
> out and) inform Haman and he consider (it) and flee and escape out her
> hands, for he was a powerful man. (4) Fourth, because, while they would
> be eating, drinking, and rejoicing, she would be in distress, grief, and
> despair, and perhaps God would take account of this. (5) Fifth, that Israel
> might trust in the Lord and pray fervently and not trust in Esther, and
> so she exhibited to them (the sentiment) "I favor (Haman) greatly and
> am not worried about you"—(to which,) perhaps, Israel would despair

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44. The printed portion of *Sēfer hā-ʿōsher*, included under the rubric of Aaron
ben Joseph's *Mibḥhar yĕshārīm*, is now freely accessible on the National Library
of Israel website: http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_
pid=IE13020860 (the commentary on Esther is on pp. 17a–b of the pagination begin-
ning with Proverbs). On the commentary on Ruth and Jacob's epitome thereof, see Z.
Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium: The Formative Years, 970–1100*, Columbia Studies in
the Social Sciences 597 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 197 n. 105. On
the extant witnesses to the anonymous Byzantine commentary, see Wechsler, *Yefet*,
133, to which should also be added MS RSL 182:403, fols. 37v–46r (a modern copy of
SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 1:583, fols. 22r–35r).

greatly and call out passionately to the Lord. (6) Sixth, to sow jealousy in the king's heart, insofar as the king would have thought, "Perhaps they are planning to kill me," whereupon he would execute both Haman and Esther and the decree would be annulled. (7) Seventh, in order to draw Haman under the king's direct control, so as to execute him quickly, for she knew that the king was fickle and might relent (of his execution); hence she confined Haman with herself and with (the king) in the same room. (8) Eighth, that he might not discern that she was a Jew and anxious about Israel; hence she prepared a banquet in order to show that she was joyful.[45]

Although this particular passage is not epitomized by Jacob ben Reuben in his *Sēfer hā-ʿōsher*,[46] its presence in this anonymous compilation—especially when considered together with the many other loosely translated excerpts from Saʿadia's commentary found therein[47]—attests to a far greater degree of penetration by Rabbanite-rabbinic exegesis into early Byzantine Karaite exegetical thought than one might have expected, given the polemical focus and undertone of previous scholarship on the interplay between Rabbanites and Karaites during this period. Indeed, that the Rabbanite exegesis in question is specifically that of the Karaites' arch-polemical opponent Saʿadia Gaon (albeit noncitatively presented), and that it is found in a work clearly deriving from the *communally-oriented* literature of the early Byzantine Karaite community,[48] only reinforces one's impression of the intellectual receptivity to and breadth of this penetration. A fuller assessment of this multilayered—that is, Rabbanite-Karaite as well as Islamicate-Byzantine—intellectual and literary "conviviality" (to borrow the apropos rubric by which Saʿadia himself sums up the theme of Esther), and the extent to which it characterizes

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45. Per MS SP RNL Yevr.-Arab. 2:A 78, fol. 22v (cited also in Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 299 n. 114).

46. Nor have we found any evidence of this passage in the anonymous compilation being directly referenced in the later Karaite Hebrew commentaries on Esther by Abraham ben Judah (fifteenth century; in his complete Bible commentary ספר יסוד מקרא, per MS RU Or. 4739 [Warn. 1], fols. 234r–35r) or Moses ben Judah Meṣṣorodi (d. 1637; in his Esther commentary משאת משה, per MS SP IOS B 238, fols. 106r–228v).

47. For a preliminary enumeration of these see the index in Wechsler, *Conviviality*, 494–95 (under "A Byzantine Karaite exegetical compilation on Esther").

48. For a discussion of this literature, representing the so-called "Byzantine Karaite Literary Project," and of which the anonymous compilation under discussion bears all the main hallmarks, see Ankori, *Byzantium*, 415–44.

later Karaite exegesis of other biblical books, are matters that remain to be explored in future scholarship.

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articles "The Observance of the Commandments in the Diaspora on the Eve of Redemption in the Doctrine of the Karaite Mourners of Zion," *Hen* 19 (1997): 175–202; and "Understanding the Qumran Sect in View of Early Karaite Halakhah from the Geonic Period," *RevQ* 26 (2014): 403–23. Erder also studies the complex relationship between Shiʿite Islamic sources and proto-Karaite and Karaite (scriptural and messianic) texts, as in his article "The Doctrine of Abú Isá al-Isfahání and Its Sources," *JSAI* 20 (1996): 162–99. His comprehensive English monograph on these topics and others has recently been published under the title *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls: On the History of an Alternative to Rabbinic Judaism* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

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action of these genres with Islamic and Christian sources. He has also published (with Amir Ashur and Meira Polliack) "Three Fragments of Saʿadya Gaon's Arabic Translation of Isaiah copied by the Court Scribe Joseph ben Samuel (c. 1181–1209)," in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition*, ed. Miriam Lindgren Hjälm (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 485–508.

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the Scriptural Text in Medieval Karaite Bible Translations," in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*, ed. Miriam Lindgren Hjälm (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 153–81; "The Bible Read through the Prism of Theology: The Rendering of Explicit Anthropomorphisms in the Medieval Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation," *JJTP* 24 (2016): 1–66; and "'Where the Plain Meaning Is Obscure or Unacceptable …': The Treatment of Implicit Anthropomorphisms in the Medieval Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation," *EJJS* 10 (2016): 1–49.

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