

A Genizah Fragment of Saadya Gaon's Bible Translation Copied by Mevōrākh b. Nāthān in the 12th Century*

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Resumen

El presente artículo analiza el manuscrito de JTS ENA NS 69.12, un fragmento conservado en la Guenizá de la traducción de Saadya Gaon a Números 27.18-22, 28.2-7. Su escriba puede ser identificado como Mevōrākh b. Nāthān, un conocido escriba activo en Fustāṭ entre 1150–1180 d.C. El artículo incluye su transcripción, un aparato crítico y su análisis filológico y lingüístico. Este fragmento de la Guenizá muestra similitudes con otros fragmentos de la traducción de Saadya copiados durante el siglo XII y refleja varias características propias del judeo-árabe medio, pero también sigue en varios aspectos la versión transmitida en el manuscrito más antiguo que conocemos de la traducción de Saadya Gaon al Pentateuco, MS San Petersburgo RNL Yevr. II C 1, copiado por Samuel ben Jacob a principios del siglo XI.

Palabras clave

Traducción de la Biblia de Saadya Gaon; traducciones judeo-árabes de la Biblia;
Guenizá; Judeo-Árabe.

Abstract

The article discusses JTS ENA NS 69.12, a Genizah fragment of Saadya Gaon's translation of Numbers 27.18-22, 28.2-7, whose scribe can be identified as Mevōrākh b. Nāthān, a well-known scribe active in Fustāṭ in 1150–1180 CE. The article includes its transcription, a critical apparatus, and its philological and linguistic analysis. This Genizah fragment shows similarities to other fragments of Saadya's translation copied in the 12th century and reflects various Middle Judeo-Arabic features but also follows in various aspects the version found in the earliest dated inclusive manuscript of Saadya

* This study is part of a larger research project conducted by Prof. Tamar Zewi of the University of Haifa with the assistance of Dr. Amir Ashur and Dr. Barak Avirbach on Early Genizah Fragments of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch. The research was supported by the ISRAEL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (grant No. 150/15). We would like to thank Dr. Barak Avirbach for providing the first draft of the transcription of the Genizah fragment discussed in this paper based on its photo on the internet site of the Friedberg Genizah Project (<https://fjms.genizah.org>). The transcription was also checked by Tamar Zewi against the original in the Firestone Library at Princeton University, where it is temporarily held. Tamar Zewi would like to thank Prof. Mark Cohen and Prof. Marina Rustow for sponsoring several research visits to Princeton through 2015–2016, and also Prof. Martha Himmelfarb for sponsoring her six-month Sabbatical leave there in 2016.

Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch known to us, MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1, copied by Samuel ben Jacob in the beginning of the 11th century.

Keywords

Saadya Gaon's Bible Translation; Judeo-Arabic Bible Translations; Genizah; Judeo-Arabic.

Introduction

Saadya Gaon's Bible translation, known as *tafsīr* Saadya Gaon,¹ is attested in thousands of manuscripts in the Cairo Genizah. Unfortunately however, these are usually fragmentary and by far the majority lack details of their scribes and remain anonymous. Most scribes appearing in the Genizah who communicated in Judeo-Arabic written in Hebrew characters are known to us from legal documents or letters, which they signed. Scholars working on Judeo-Arabic Bible translations in general, including Saadya Gaon's, are as a rule hardly exposed to them. Therefore, cooperation between scholars researching Judeo-Arabic Bible translations and those researching documentary Genizah material is highly desirable and may contribute greatly to revealing the identity of various scribes involved in copying some of these Genizah fragments.

To date only a few scribes of Genizah fragments of Saadya Gaon's Bible translations have been identified. A good example is the scribe of two Genizah fragments in the Cambridge University Genizah collection, T-S AS 72.79 and T-S Ar.1a.38; he was identified by Vollandt as the known scribe Shmuel b. Jacob (active 1009–1010 CE). Vollandt based his conclusions on a comparison of the handwriting and style of these two fragments to the handwriting and style of MS St Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1, a manuscript containing Saadya Gaon's

¹ Also commonly *tafsīr* RASAG, a Hebrew shortcut for Rav Saadya Gaon. On the characteristics of this translation, its transmission and significance, see e.g. H. Ben-Shammai, *A Leader's Project: Studies in the Philosophical and Exegetical Works of Saadya Gaon*. Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute 2015; R. Brody, *Rav Se'adya Gaon*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center 2006 (in Hebrew), pp. 70-90; S. H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013: 162-165; M. Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translations: A Linguistic & Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth & Eleventh Centuries CE*. Leiden: E.J. Brill 1997, pp. 77-90; E. Schlossberg, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Translation of the Torah by Rav Saadia Gaon." *Judaica* 67 (2011), pp. 129-145; R. Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources*. Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 80-84; T. Zewi, *The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch: Critical Edition and Study of MS London BL OR7562 and Related MSS*. Leiden: Brill 2015, pp. 25-40; M. Zucker, *Rav Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Torah: Exegesis, Halakha, and Polemics in R. Saadya's Translation of the Pentateuch*. New York: Philipp Feldheim 1959 (in Hebrew).

translation of the Pentateuch signed by this Shmuel b. Jacob.² Recently we have managed to identify another Genizah fragment, which was also most probably copied by the same scribe.³

With this article our intention is to present another Genizah fragment whose scribe, we believe, can be identified. He is Mevōrākh b. Nāthān, a well-known scribe active in Fustāt in 1150–1180 CE. Dozens of documents written by him are found in the Genizah, e.g. CUL T-S 12.238, which contains Maimonides' circular letter to the Jewish congregations of the Egyptian Delta (*ar-rīf*).⁴ By identifying his handwriting in a Genizah fragment containing a remnant of Saadya Gaon's Bible translation, we learn that this scribe's activity exceeded writing documentary material and included copying and transmission of literary texts. We hope that the identification of the scribe of this fragment may lead to additional discoveries of a similar sort in Mevōrākh b. Nāthān's hand. The fragment, JTS ENA NS 69.12,⁵ is a small shred of one page written on both sides, containing Saadya's translation to Numbers 27.18-22, 28.2-7. A transcription, including critical apparatus and a philological and linguistic analysis of this fragmentary text, is presented below. We recently identified the scribe of two additional fragments from Saadya's translation of Deuteronomy, JTS ENA 3313.2-3, whose handwriting is very probably that of another famous court scribe, Hillel b. Eli (1066-1113 CE). We hope to publish these two fragments in the near future.

² R. Vollandt, "Two fragments (T-S AS 72.79 and T-S Ar.1a.38) of Saadiyah's tafsīr by Samuel ben Jacob." [<https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/taylor-schechter-genizah-research-unit/fragment-month/fragment-month-12-4>]. Published online 2009. For more on this manuscript see in J. Blau, "Saadya Gaon's Pentateuch Translation in Light of an Early-Eleventh-Century Egyptian Manuscript." *Leshonenu* 61 (1998), pp. 111-130 (in Hebrew).

³ T. Zewi, "MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II A 640: A Possible Remnant of another Copy of Saadya Gaon's Tafsīr by Samuel ben Jacob." *Vetus Testamentum* (forthcoming). For another identification of the hand-writing of a known scribe, Yoseph b. Shmuel, in three Genizah fragments of Saadya Gaon's translation of Isaiah, see A. Ashur, S. Nir & M. Polliack, "Three Fragments of Sa'adya Gaon's Arabic Translation of Isaiah copied by the Court Scribe Joseph ben Samuel." Pp. 487–508 in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims*. Edited by M. Lindgren Hjälms. Leiden: Brill 2017.

⁴ See no. 22 in Goitein's list of Jewish Judges in Old (and New) Cairo 965–1265 (S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* I-VI. Berkeley: University of California Press 1971, vol. II: 514; more details on the circular are presented *ibid.*: 549).

⁵ The number of this fragment in the Friedberg Genizah Project is FGP No. C4886. It is part of the Jewish Theological Seminary collection in New York of Cairo Genizah fragments, and is provisionally kept in the Manuscript Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Transcription and Critical Apparatus of JTS ENA NS 69.12

Below is a full transcription of JTS ENA NS 69.12, accompanied by a critical apparatus. The first source selected for the critical apparatus is MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1, the early manuscript of Saadya Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch copied in the beginning of the 11th century. Two other important complementary manuscripts of Saadya Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch, which may be consulted for lacunas in the earlier manuscripts, are MSS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 395-396, copied in the mid-15th century. The translation of the book of Numbers is found in the second, MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396, which was also selected for the critical edition. As the Derenbourg edition, published at the end of the 19th century, is still the best available critical edition of Saadya Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch, it is also cited in the critical apparatus. Finally, the Yemenite branch, the Taj, which is usually a triglot displaying in a sequence the Hebrew verse, the Aramaic Onkelos translation, and Saadya Gaon's Judeo-Arabic translation, is represented in the critical apparatus by the printed edition of Shalom 'Irāqi Katz and Avraham Nadaf, first published in the late 19th century. Their abbreviations in the critical apparatus are given in the list of symbols below.

List of symbols and abbreviations:

...	part of a verse not preserved in the Genizah fragment
(1.1)	chapter and verse numbers
[.]	missing character
[..]	two missing characters
[...]	more than two missing characters
[⌘]	fragmentary characters ⁶
/	line divider
⌘	Hebrew Font SBL marks Hebrew incipits
⌘	Hebrew Font Times New Roman used for the Judeo-Arabic translation
D	The Derenbourg edition ⁷
Pt	MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1
Ox	MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396
T	Taj

⁶ No reconstructions were made in the transcription. Only characters which are at least partly legible are included in the transcription.

⁷ For full bibliographical details of the four preliminary sources selected for the critical apparatus see the list of primary sources at the end of the article.

Transcription of JTS ENA NS 69.12v:⁸ Numbers 27.18-22

(27.18) ... [א. סנד / [...]. (27.19) [...]. [ב] ין ידי אלעזר אל⁹ / [...]. (27.20) ...
 [...] ואגעל עליה / [...] גמא[עה בני אסר'¹⁰ (27.21) ולפני / [...] כן¹¹ [ק. ופה בין ידי ...]
 [...] אמאם חתי יסל¹² פי חואיגה / [...] היה¹³ אלאנואר בין ידי [...] לל. ע. אמרה ידכלו ויכרגו¹⁴
 הו / [...] ני¹⁵ אסר' וסאיר אלגמאעה. (27.22) ויעש. פצנע מוסי כמא¹⁶ / [...] מרה אל[ה] באן¹⁷
 א[כד יה] ושע [ו] אוקפה בין ידי אלעזר אלאמאם¹⁸ / וסאיר אלגמאעה.¹⁹

Transcription of JTS ENA NS 69.12r: Numbers 28.2-7

(28.2) ... [א. ו[ק]ל [...] / אחפט[ו]ה אן [...] לי²⁰ [...] (28.3) [...] [...] / אן אלמריצי
 אל[...] / [...] פי כל יום דאי[מא].²¹ (28.4) [...] [...] / ואלאכר בין אלגרוובין. (28.5) [...] [...] /
 וע[ש]ר [...] / סמד²² מן אלבר מלתו[ת] ברב[ע] קסט מן דהן מט[ו] [...] (28.6) עולת. צעידה
 דאימה כמא צנעת פי ברי[ו].²⁴ / סיני מקבולה מרציה²⁵ ללה. (28.7) ונסכו. ומעה מן אל[ו]²⁶ /
 מזאג רבע קסט לכל חמל ירש פי אלקדס רש[ו] [...] ...

⁸ Recto is bound as verso.

⁹ The definite article אל is written separate from the following word at the end of the line.

¹⁰ אסר' is a shortcut of אסראיל. See another example in the next verse.

¹¹ Pt, Ox, D וליכון, T וליכן.

¹² Ox, D, T יסאל.

¹³ Pt, D בהיאה, T בהייה.

¹⁴ The word ידכלו is marked by another hand with the letter ב above it, and the word ויכרגו is marked with the letter א, to indicate the "correct" order of these words in the sentence. An opposite word order is found also in Pt, Ox, D, T – in Pt in the indicative וידכלון ויכרגו.

¹⁵ Pt, D ובנו, Ox, T ובני.

¹⁶ The word is written by the same hand in smaller hand, slightly above the line, due to lack of space.

¹⁷ Pt, Ox, D, T אן.

¹⁸ This word was originally omitted and added by a later hand in the left margin.

¹⁹ The last two words were written on the left side of the bottom margins, under the last line.

²⁰ The word was added in the right margin by a later hand.

²¹ Similarly in Pt, but in Ox, D, T פי כל יום צעידה דאימא.

²² Similarly in Ox, T, סמיד in D, but in Ms. St. Petersburg סמזא in the accusative.

²³ Similarly in Ox, D, T but in Pt מלתותא in the accusative. It is unclear how the word מלתות ended here because only a short line of the right side of the ת was preserved, but there seems to be no room for the א.

²⁴ Only in Pt גבל בריה.

²⁵ Only in Pt מקבולא מרציה in disagreement with the noun דאימה in the feminine in all four sources and in the accusative instead.

²⁶ אל is written separately at the end of the line.

Philological and Linguistic Analysis of JTS ENA NS 69.12

The Judeo-Arabic translation displayed in JTS ENA NS 69.12 follows a Hebrew incipit, a practice commonly attested in many early Genizah fragments of Saadya Gaon's Bible translation. But note that the Judeo-Arabic translation in similar Genizah fragments may also be displayed without any preceding Hebrew text; following the full Hebrew verse; following the full Hebrew verse and its Aramaic translation; or following the Aramaic translation. The Judeo-Arabic text and the Hebrew incipits in JTS ENA NS 69.12 are written in the same type of semi-cursive script. So it is in some Genizah fragments, while in others Hebrew incipits may also be displayed in an earlier square script.

As to the orthography conventions in JTS ENA NS 69.12, diacritics are used to mark only *ض* (ض) and *ظ* (ظ), and are attested in *אלמרצי* (Num. 28.3), *מרציה* (Num. 28.6), and *אחפט[ן]יה* (Num. 28.2). This practice is the standard in other early Genizah fragments and manuscripts of Saadya Gaon's translation into Judeo-Arabic in Hebrew characters, e.g. JTS ENA 2674.5, JTS ENA 3830.1-2, London BL Or. 5562A.11-12, and often in MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1, cited in this article.²⁷ In many Genizah fragments of Saadya Gaon's Bible translation certain common words are abbreviated. This is attested in JTS ENA NS 69.12 too, in which *אסר'* is used twice for *אסראיל* (Num. 27.20, 21). Another common practice in many Genizah fragments of Saadya Gaon's Bible translation is the use of the definite article at the end of a line separated from the following noun. This practice is attested in JTS ENA NS 69.12 at the end of Num. 27.19, 28.7.

Vocabulary does not reveal any variation among JTS ENA NS 69.12 and the four other sources compared with it. Grammatical variation, on the other hand, does exist in several cases. Consequently, JTS ENA NS 69.12, as small as it is, sheds some light on the language phase it belongs to and on its connections to the other sources. Examples are these:

1. The jussive verb *לי[כ]ן* (Num. 27.21) is preserved in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and similarly appears in all sources examined but the Taj, which is the latest.
2. The form *יסל* translates *ישאל* (Num. 27.21) in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1. In all three other later sources the form is *יסאל*, as the full form of middle א verbs. The form *יסל* reflects a

²⁷ Occasionally diacritic marking appears in contemporaneous early Genizah fragments and other manuscripts of Saadya Gaon's translation also for *ل* (ل) or *غ* (غ). But it is not usual for all Hebrew characters which represent Arabic letters with diacritics, e.g. *ה* (ه), *כ* (כ), and *י* (ي), as well as *תא מרבושה* (ة).

transition of the verb from a middle א to a middle י verb, attested in Middle Judeo-Arabic.²⁸

3. Transformation from a final א to a final י root is reflected in the form [ב]היה in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396, with a similar form בהייה in the Taj. But this form is unlike that in MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1 and the Derenbourg edition, where the spelling is בהיאה. Such a transition is familiar in Judeo-Arabic.²⁹
4. The two verbs ידכלו ויכרגו (Num. 27.21) appear in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and all other sources except MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1: there the two verbs are the long forms of the indicative יכרגון וידכלון. The shortened forms seem to reflect fluctuation between the prefix conjugation short and long forms and often loss of the longer ones, which are typical of Middle Judeo-Arabic.³⁰
5. The form [..]ני (Num. 27.21) in JTS ENA NS 69.12, and similarly ובני in MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396 and the Taj, versus ובנו in the nominative in MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1 and the Derenbourg edition, reflects the loss of the nominative case marking of the sound plural form in the Genizah fragment, as commonly attested in Middle Judeo-Arabic.³¹
6. The two forms סמד and [ת]מלתו (Num. 28.5) in JTS ENA NS 69.12, MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396, the Derenbourg edition, and the Taj (the former is סמיד in the Derenbourg edition) versus סמדה and מלתותה in the accusative in MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1 reflect loss of the accusative case in Middle Judeo-Arabic.³² Compare these two forms with רש[א] (Num. 28.7) in the accusative in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and all other sources examined. Likewise the form דאי[מא] (Num. 28.3) in all these sources, but this may be a retained fossilized form of an adverb.³³

One example of an early version preserved in JTS ENA NS 69.12 is פי כל יום [מא]דאי (Num. 28.3); this version is paralleled in MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1, while in all three other sources examined it is an extended one: פי כל יום צעידה דאימא.

²⁸ Compare to J. Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1980. (Second Enlarged Edition, in Hebrew.), p. 83.

²⁹ Compare to Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, p. 84.

³⁰ Compare to Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, pp. 125-127.

³¹ Compare to Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, pp. 106-107.

³² Compare to Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, pp. 150-154; M. A. Friedman, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judeo-Arabic in the India Book Letters from the Geniza and in Other Texts*. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute 2016, p. 940.

³³ Compare to Blau, *A Grammar of Mediaeval Judaeo-Arabic*, p. 150.

Conclusions

The Genizah fragment discussed in this paper, as short as it may seem, reveals various interesting characteristics, which show similarities to other Saadyan versions copied in the 12th century. From a philological and linguistic viewpoint, it reflects various Middle Judeo-Arabic features, and in some cases versions close to the early manuscript of Saadya Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch, MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1. Identification of the scribe of this fragment allows us to connect our philological and linguistic observations to an important Jewish figure active at this time and known from many other documentary Genizah fragments, and thus create a solid chronological anchor for this type of Genizah fragments.

Abreviaturas

Derenbourg edition	Derenbourg, J., ed. <i>Œuvres complètes de R. Saadia ben Josef al-Fayyôûmî I, Version arabe du Pentateuque</i> . Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893 (repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1979).
MS St. Petersburg RNL Yevr. II C 1	St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, MS Yevr. II C 1, undated, ca. 1009/1010.
MSS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 395-396	Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Poc. 395-396, copied 1448.
Taj	ספר כתר תורה הנקרא בלשון קדמונינו תאג [The Pentateuch, Named Taj by Our Ancestors], Jerusalem: Shalom 'Irāqi, 1899 (repr. Jerusalem: A. Ḥasīd, 1968).