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*Edited by*

JOSHUA BLAU

MORDECHAI A. FRIEDMAN

HAGGAI BEN-SHAMMAI

JOEL L. KRAEMER

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# RABBINIC TRANSLATIONS OF SCRIPTURE INTO JUDAEO-ARABIC DURING THE 12TH–15TH CENTURIES AND THEIR AFFINITY WITH THE TRANSLATION OF RAV SE'ADYA GAON

by Yitzhak Avishur

During the 12th–15th centuries the Holy Scriptures were translated into Arabic by Copts, Samaritans, Karaites and Rabbinites, and many of these translation bear an affinity with the translation of Rav Se'adya Gaon. Knowledge of rabbinic translations during this period are derived from the following sources:

1. Titles of manuscripts, including translations, mentioned in book-lists from the Geniza;
2. Geniza fragments containing translations that differ from those of Rav Se'adya;
3. Collections of translations of the Torah, the Early Prophets and the Later Prophets.

This article is devoted to a study of the translation of the Later Prophets in Ms. Oxford-Bodleian 181, which contains an almost complete translation of all the books of the Later Prophets, lacking about 20 pages due to damage. These were restored by a later hand from the 16th century, apparently from Syria, as the restored text is written in the Syrian Judaeo-Arabic dialect.

The article considers the affinity of this translation with the translation of Rav Se'adya and stresses the use of ritual and religious terms coined by Se'adya; similar roots in Arabic and Hebrew; use of Persian words in place names and their identification, etc. On the other hand, the degree of independence of the translation as well as its affinity with TJ to the Later Prophets are also noted. Finally, the identity and provenance of the translator are discussed according to various data.

A THEORY AS A SIMILE: SOME NOTES ON RAV SE'ADYA  
GAON'S DENIAL OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM

by Binyamin Abrahamov

According to Rav Se'adya Gaon, the incorporeality and transcendence of God derive from biblical verses and philosophical considerations. God is transcendent both from the point of view of ontology and epistemology. Consequently, biblical anthropomorphic verses are figuratively interpreted and the existence of attributes, as real spiritual entities, is denied of God. However, not only do the essence and attributes of God remain incomprehensible but creation ex nihilo as well. In his interpretation of ספר יצירה, Rav Se'adya introduces nine theories of creation, the last and the preferable of all being instantaneous creation. How does this system coincide with the theory of ספר יצירה which shows that the world was created gradually? This problem and others are solved by using similes. Rav Se'adya explains how God, the spiritual entity, can govern the corporeal world by comparing Himself to man's intellect. Likewise, the expansion of His rule in the world is expounded by a simile; it is likened to the expansion of air everywhere. The creation theory of ספר יצירה is also a simile through which man can imagine how the world was created all at once, for man cannot perceive the concept of instantaneous creation. This simile coincides with the process of thinking; the first subject which one must learn is geometry, for through it the structure of an object can be perceived. The world was created at once, but man's imagination divides this process into stages. In considering the theory of ספר יצירה as simile, Se'adya complies with his perception of God and creation as transcendent.

A STUDY OF BIBLICAL PARAPHRASE IN JUDAEO-ARABIC  
THE STORY OF NA'AMAN'S LEPROSY

by Nahem Ilan

מצח אהרן, a Judaeo-Arabic commentary on the Pentateuch in Hebrew characters was composed by R. Aharon Garish, in the beginning of the 16th century (before 1527), probably in northern Syria, *i.e.* Aleppo or its vicinity. The commentary deals exclusively with the Pentateuch, the only exception being the pericope תזריע which contains a discussion of the story of Na'aman's leprosy (2 Kings, 5). It is noted that the author has paraphrased this story while introducing numerous changes of a significant nature. Following is a list of the major differences:

- a. The biblical story is a written one, while the paraphrase is based on a sermon;
- b. In the Bible, this story forms part of the cycle of stories dealing with Elisha, the Prophet. In מצח אהרן the context is the subject of leprosy;
- c. Most of the changes can be explained by the tendencies of simplification and completion of the biblical text;
- d. The aim of the biblical story is to reach the conclusion that every individual is subordinate to God, and that everything is derived from Him, while the purpose of the sermon is to show the realization of God's policy of reward and punishment.

It may thus be concluded that this written sermon is not merely a paraphrase, but actually serves as an interpretation of the biblical narrative which expresses an entirely different tendency.

THE STATUS OF THE CLASSICAL ARABIC LAYER  
OF MEDIEVAL JUDAEO-ARABIC

by Joshua Blau

Judaeo-Arabic (= JA), as Middle Arabic (= MA) in general, reflects almost free alternation between classical (= c), post-classical (= pc), vernacular and pseudo-correct (= psc) elements. JA authors intended to write c Arabic (= CA), yet fell short of their aim, as proven by the fact that JA texts (as MA in general) are a veritable hothouse of psc features. This description deserves special emphasis, since R. Drory (*The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century*, Tel-Aviv 1988, especially pp. 49ff.), has recently claimed that the linguistic consciousness of Jewish authors was limited to Hebrew, and that their Arabic (= A) had no aesthetic-literary function. Such a thesis is refuted, *inter alia*, by the plethora of psc elements, proving that the Jewish authors actually aimed at utilizing CA, as well as by the exact parallel arrangement of Christian A and of Muslim MA texts. Moreover, the style of some A texts demonstrates that A also had an aesthetic-literary function.

Although JA authors tried to write in CA, it is shown that, at the most, they utilized pc A, presumably because CA and pc A were differentiated in theory, rather than in praxis. The scientific literature read by Jews was composed in pc A and was thus imitated by Jewish authors.

It is not always easy to differentiate between c and pc elements occurring in JA texts, since not only is pc A not well defined, but even c features are not always recognized. Thus *إِلَّا مَا* may be used in adjurations, *رُبَّمَا* 'sometimes, perhaps' may be followed by the perfect denoting the present or the future, *وَأِلَّا فَ* 'otherwise' may continue a statement, *إِلَىٰ أَنْ* is used in the sense of *إِذَا حَتَّىٰ*, and *خَاصَّةً* may denote 'only'.

THE TRANSLATION AND THE COMMENTARY OF R. ISAAC BEN  
SAMUEL HA-SEFARADI TO SE'ADYA'S POEM אָם לְפִי בְּחֶרֶף

by Yosef Tobi

אָם לְפִי בְּחֶרֶף is one of the most impressive and magnificent poems (176 verses) of Rav Se'adya Gaon (882–942). It is one of the few payyetic creations in which the private impressions of the poet as a national leader as well as a philosopher are fleshed out. This poem was very popular during the Middle Ages, as may be deduced from the numerous manuscript copies of it found in the Cairo Geniza. Another proof of its popularity is the fact that it was translated into Judaeo-Arabic for the benefit of the Eastern Jewish communities who were not sufficiently familiar with the Hebrew language, especially the high-rated rhetorical and obscure language, so typical of Rav Se'adya in some of his poetical works. For the same reason, two separate Judaeo-Arabic commentaries were composed. One of these was written by R. Isaac ben Samuel Ha-Sefaradi, the author of the Judaeo-Arabic translation, who flourished in Egypt during the twelfth century, and is well known due to his communal activity and literary output. Even though the author of the second commentary is unknown, it is, nevertheless, of much greater interest, as it is both an expansive and philosophic commentary. Unfortunately, both commentaries are incomplete, particularly the second one of which only a few leaves have remained extant in the Geniza. The present author is presently engaged in the preparation of a comprehensive critical edition of the poem, its translation and both of the above-mentioned commentaries, according to the Geniza fragments. In the present article, the methodology of both translation and commentary is discussed. The introduction of R. Issac ben Samuel to his translation and commentary is included in an appendix.

THE OPINIONS OF QIRQISĀNĪ CONCERNING THE TEXT OF  
THE BIBLE AND PARALLEL MUSLIM ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
THE TEXT OF THE QUR'ĀN

by Geoffrey Khan

In his work, *Kitāb al-'Anwār w-al-Marāqib*, the Karaite scholar al-Qirqisānī discusses the text of the Bible and the basis of its authority. He maintains that the authority for the text does not rest upon a tradition leading back to a small group of sages or scribes, but rather to the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the nation as a whole. He concedes, however, that in the case of differences between the Tiberian and the Babylonian text of the Bible, the former is to be preferred due to its being a more reliable tradition. Qirqisānī was evidently forced to make this compromise on his notion of consensus by practical necessity.

Similar notions regarding the authority of Scripture are found in Islam. In the early Islamic sources, consensus is regarded as the crucial source of authority for the text of the Qur'ān. Eventually, however, Muslim scholars submitted to practical necessity and restricted the basis of authority to the tradition of specific Qur'ān readers.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE MEDIEVAL HEBREW  
GRAMMARIANS MADE LINGUISTIC COMPARISONS?

by Aharon Maman

No attempt has been made heretofore to reconstruct the full-scale development of medieval comparative philology. The only existing description is the attempt of Isaac ibn Barun during the 12th century, but his scale proposes only a limited number of stages. In the present article, an attempt is made to provide an over-all description of the various stages.

It is likely to assume that, at the outset, attention was focused on cognate translational equivalents of equal sounds, number and order, such as Hebrew/Arabic/Aramaic basic words of the types אב/אב, אב/אב, אב/אב. At a later stage, words that required sound shifts, such as Heb./Ar. אב/אב, אב/אב, אב/אב or Heb./Aram. אב/אב, אב/אב, אב/אב, were also compared.

Once attention was paid to the systematic similarity in sound shifts in the realm of basic words, a comparison of less common words also began. An equality of sounds (or letters, regarding written parallel texts) presented an additional level of difficulty, e.g., אב/אב, אב/אב. Comparisons that require an assumption of metathesis, e.g., אב/אב, אב/אב, seem to have followed. Beyond this type, one finds comparisons that require both sound shifts and metathesis, such as אב/אב, אב/אב. Later on, more sophisticated and learned comparisons that combined more than two entries, requiring a greater knowledge of biblical *Targumim* (Aramaic translations), as well as talmudic and geonic literature ensued. To make a tripartite comparison, one had to draw together a biblical Hebrew entry with an Aramaic equivalent that was not found in the *Targum* to the same verse, but rather in the translation of a different word in another location, e.g., אב/אב, אב/אב. This combination of entries from three languages constituted an additional level of difficulty. Tripartite comparisons which combined a Hebrew entry with its unetymological translational equivalent in Aramaic, which, in turn, was compared with its Arabic cognate, e.g., אב/אב, אב/אב, were even more difficult.

In the course of time, comparisons were subjected to a more abstract and sophisticated manipulation which assumed *taskhif*, i.e. the occurrence of mistaken external similarities, such as Heb./Ar. אב/אב. At the top of this scale are semantic and grammatical comparisons, which are not based on similarities of sound.

To conclude, those comparisons which dealt with basic words possessing similarity in writing, pronunciation and meaning were of the much more simple type. The more the comparisons combined entries from several languages, or required metathesis and change of letters with a lesser degree of semantic equivalence, or were not based at all on verbal similarity, the more they became difficult. This study makes no pretense whatsoever to describe the actual historical development, but rather seeks to propose a hypothetical level of difficulties. Actually, the earliest grammarians who

engaged in comparative philology employed all of these specific types. For instance, Rav Se'adya Gaon, who was the first to make comparisons between Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic, worked on a rather sophisticated scale.

Compared with modern comparative linguistics, medieval theory and practice seem to lack the diachronic perspective alone.

## THE SOURCE OF THE ḤANUKKA STORY IN THE HOMILIES OF R. DAVID HA-NAGID TO GENESIS

by Shulamit Sela

R. David b. Abraham Maimuni (1220–1300 C.E.), grandson of Maimonides and Nagid (head) of the Jewish community of Egypt is considered, in the tradition of Eastern Jewry, to be the author of Midrash R. *David ha-Nagid*, a collection of homilies on the Torah, written in Judaeo-Arabic. This work enjoyed a wide circulation during the middle ages.

The present paper analyses the story of the Ḥanukka festival according to the homilies to the Torah portions וישב and מקץ, which are traditionally read on the sabbaths of Ḥanukka. It is shown that the Midrash utilized the Scroll of Antiochus as a source for the rabbinical tradition of Ḥanukka as well as *the Book of Yosippon* in the Arabic version, in order to portray the apocryphal history of the holiday. It is noted that the two separate versions have been molded into one consecutive story. Harmony between the two versions has been achieved by the unification of plots and heroes. *Midrash R. David ha-Nagid* ascribes this literary history of Ḥanukka to the Jewish sages.

R. DAVID BEN SE'ADYA AL-GER AND HIS WORK *AL-ḤĀWĪ*

by David E. Sklare

Only scant remains of early Spanish halakhic literature have survived. The book *al-Ḥāwī* is a halakhic compendium written by R. David ben Se'adya al-Ger, who was active during the second quarter of the eleventh century and who was evidently a member of the circle of intellectual elite surrounding R. Samuel ha-Nagid. Numerous fragments of this work have been preserved in the Cairo Geniza. This article describes the general structure and style of the work and presents the basis for identifying David ben Se'adya al-Ger as its author. It is further suggested that he is to be identified with the halakhist known heretofore as David ibn Hujjar. *Al-Ḥāwī* was written in Judaeo-Arabic with Aramaic summaries. This phenomenon leads to a brief examination of the distinctions between the literary genre of *halakhot* written in Aramaic or Hebrew and that of halakhic monographs written in Judaeo-Arabic.

## ELEVENTH CENTURY ARABIC LETTERS FROM THE CAIRO GENIZA: THE LETTER OF FARAH ĪBN ISMA'ĪL, A MERCANTILE REPRESENTATIVE, TO ABŪ SAHL MINASHI IBN DĀŪD AL-ṢAYRAFĪ

by Ṣabīḥ 'Aodeh

This article deals with Arabic letters dating from the 11th century, preserved in the Cairo Geniza. One of these letters was written in October 1050 by the Qabise merchant, Faraḥ b. Isma'īl, from Alexandria to the money changer (ṣayrafi) Minashe b. David in Old Cairo (Ar. Fustat), informing him of ship traffic and the delivery of goods from al-Mahdiyya to the Taherti family. The scholarly edition of this letter is prefaced by a

brief introduction concerning its date and the substance of its contents. In his notes and translation, the author completes the various lacunae and discusses the problems related to the cursive and stenographic script which is most difficult to decipher, since not only the vowels, but also the diacritical marks are lacking. The lack of diacritical marks and the many ligatures indicate that the Jewish merchants were accustomed to reading and writing Arabic script. The Jewish merchants played an important role in the Fatimid Empire in terms of local and international trade, and from the newly-published letter, we learn of active ship traffic between Mahdiyya and Alexandria.

The merchant, Faraḥ b. Isma'īl, began his letter with the *basmala* (in the name of the Merciful Lord), a phrase unique to Muslims, but already used in this context by Jews in the early Middle Ages. Faraḥ also added a reminder to the courier (*fayj*) Shammār in the form of the phrase *amānā mūṣala* (in the trust of the bearer), indicating that the courier was a Muslim and therefore obliged to obey the Qur'ān commandment: "The Lord commands you to return the trust to its owner".

## A DISPUTE BETWEEN A YEMENITE DIVINE AND R. ABRAHAM MAIMUNI CONCERNING THE MARRIAGE PAYMENT AND THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION

by Mordechai A. Friedman

No. 82 in the collected Responsa of R. Abraham Maimuni, the first of a group of thirteen rulings (nos. 82–94) which he sent to Yemen, is the most verbose legal opinion in the entire collection. Maimuni attributes the extraordinary length of this responsum to the momentous issue discussed therein, the sum of the minimum marriage payment, on which the very validity of a marriage is contingent. The traditional Yemenite custom had set the sum at 25 Arab dirhems, nominally the same figure as the talmudic 25 zuz. Contrariwise, R. Abraham, basing himself, *inter alia*, on his father

Maimonides' somewhat ambiguous ruling, calculated the talmudic sum at approximately 36 dirhems.

The full texts of the thirteen queries from Yemen were not prefaced to the Nagid's rulings but only brief synopses of the queries. The present writer has identified among the Geniza fragments the original manuscript, sent from Yemen, containing the query to responsum 82 (TS 13 G 2). The Yemenite divine recounts that during that year (1427 Sel. = 1215/6 C.E.), reformers challenged the traditional local practice. The same savant subsequently sent a second pamphlet to Maimuni from Yemen. In the first of the four bifolia belonging to this pamphlet which also have been identified by the present writer (TS Ar. 49.142 + 49.149), the divine again addresses the issue of the marriage payment. Both documents have been deciphered and edited and are published herein.

These two Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts not only place Maimuni's responsum in perspective and clarify a number of points in its text, but also offer unique testimony regarding the state of rabbinic scholarship in early thirteenth century Yemen. They describe a major struggle within the Yemenite community between reformers who accepted Maimonides' rulings without reservation and traditionalists who argued in defense of time-hallowed customs. Much is to be learned from the sources adduced by the Yemenite savant. By and large, the authorities quoted are the Geonim. In lengthy citations, some of them unknown from elsewhere, he defends the authority of tradition in general and the local practice concerning the *ketubba* payment in particular.

## FALAUQUERA AS A COMMENTATOR OF MAIMONIDES' GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED

by Yair Shiffman

The commentary of R. Shem Tov Falaquera to Maimonides' Guide is characterized by the citation of relevant passages from Greek, Hellenistic,

Muslim, and some Jewish philosophers and commentators. A careful reading of his commentary reveals that Falaquera is a critical thinker, who adduces sources unknown to Maimonides, disagrees with him on several issues and introduces an original and even esoteric interpretation of his ideas. This exposure of the sources of the Guide of the Perplexed infers that Falaquera did not view Maimonides as the paragon of virtue and truth, but rather as a savant whose philosophy could be discussed and even disputed.

ANTI-MUSLIM POLEMICS IN MEDIEVAL YEMENITE  
*MIDRASHIM*

by Eliezer Schlossberg

Numerous works and compilations dealing with the biblical text were composed in Yemen between the 13th–15th centuries. As in other contemporary Jewish sources, the anti-Muslim polemic in these *midrashim* centers around two main issues: (1) Complaints against the severity of the Muslim oppression; (2) Rational and theological arguments, which were intended to refute the Muslim claims against the Bible and the Jews.

A close examination of these *midrashim* leads to the conclusion that, in comparison with other Jewish sources from the Middle Ages, the complaints against the Muslims and their rulers were relatively mild, and that the thrust of the theological polemic was somewhat limited and restricted.

It is concluded that this attitude seems to reflect the relatively comfortable social situation of the Jews of Yemen in those times.