A Genizah Fragment of Saada Gaon’s Bible Translation Copied by Mevōrākh b. Nāṭḥān in the 12th Century*

Amir Ashur and Tamar Zewi
University of Haifa

Resumen
El presente artículo analiza el manuscrito de JTS ENA NS 69.12, un fragmento conservado en la Guenizá de la traducción de Saada Gaon a Números 27.18-22, 28.2-7. Su escriba puede ser identificado como Mevōrākh b. Nāṭḥān, 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 Saada 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 Saada 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 Saada Gaon; traducciones judeo-árabes de la Biblia; Guenizá; Judeo-Árabe.

Abstract
The article discusses JTS ENA NS 69.12, a Genizah fragment of Saada Gaon’s translation of Numbers 27.18-22, 28.2-7, whose scribe can be identified as Mevōrākh b. Nāṭḥān, 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 Saada’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 Saada.

* 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 Saada 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.
Amir Ashur - Tamar Zewi

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

---

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

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 Fustāṭ 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). 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, 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.


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.
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 ˁIrāqi 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
[S] fragmentary characters\(^6\)
/ line divider
&lt; 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 69.12r: Numbers 28.2-7

(28.2) ... / ... (28.3) ... / ... (28.4) ... (28.5) ... / ... (28.6) ... / ... (28.7) ... / ...

The word ידכלון is marked by another hand with the letter p above it, and the word ידרר is marked with the letter ק, to indicate the "correct" order of these words in the sentence. An opposite word order is found also in Pt, Ox, D – in Pt in the indicative ידרר וידכלון.

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

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

Similarly in Pt, but in Ox, D, the word פיס瑀 is preserved.

Similarly in Ox, T, but in Ms. St. Petersburg סמד in the accusative.

Only in Pt פיס瑀 ended here because only a short line of the right side of the נ is preserved, but there seems to be no room for the ק.

Only in Pt פיס瑀 in disagreement with the noun הראשה in the feminine in all four sources and in the accusative instead.

גא is written separately at the end of the line.

117
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 צ (ץ) and ט (ז), and are attested in וָֽיֶּמָרָה (Num. 28.3), וּכְלָכָל (Num. 28.6), and וּלְיַעַר (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. 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 אֶֽפֶֽס (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 ליִך (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 יִשָּׁל translates בְּֽשֵּׁלֶג (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 יִשְׂאֵל, as the full form of middle ק verbs. The form יִשָּׁל reflects a

27 Occasionally diacritic marking appears in contemporaneous early Genizah fragments and other manuscripts of Saadya Gaon’s translation also for כ (ך) or ו (י). But it is not usual for all Hebrew characters which represent Arabic letters with diacritics, e.g. ח (חי), ג (ג), and ג (ג), as well as א in מֵאָב (א).
transition of the verb from a middle ו to a middle י verb, attested in Middle Judeo-Arabic. 28

3. Transformation from a final ו to a final י root is reflected in the form בהיה[2] in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396, with a similar form בהיה 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 בהיה. 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 יGGLE VI גLEGGLE. 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 יהי (Num. 27.21) in JTS ENA NS 69.12, and similarly יהי in MS Oxford Bodl. Poc. 396 and the Taj, versus יהי 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 סמיד and 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 סמידא and מלתותא 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 [א] (Num. 28.7) in the accusative in JTS ENA NS 69.12 and all other sources examined. Likewise the form [א] (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 يوم ו (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 يوم א. 34

---

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

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

Taj