The Hebrew Bible

Volume 1C
Writings

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THB logo design: Lika Tov, Jerusalem

Cover design: Celine van Hoek Leiden, the Netherlands.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lange, Armin, 1961- editor.
Title: The Hebrew Bible / edited by Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov.
Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2016- | Series: Textual history of the Bible, ISSN 2468-3027 | Includes bibliographical references and index. Contents: Vol. 1C Writings.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016013903 | ISBN 9789004337114 (v. 1C : hardback : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Bible. Old Testament–Criticism, Textual.
Classification: LCC BS1136 .H43 2016 | DDC 221.6/7–dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016013903

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2468-3027
e-ISSN 2452-4107 (THB online)
ISBN 978-90-04-33711-4 (hardback 1C)

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of MT;[15] at Ezra 8:25, Jerome seems to read the singular ההרים (*obtulerat* "he offered"; LXX: ὕψωσεν) rather than הֵרִימוּ "they offered" (= MT); at Ezra 10:16, Jerome reads לדרוש (*ut quaererent* "so that they might examine"; LXX: ἐκζητῆσαι) rather than the faulty לְדָרְיוֹשׁ of MT;[16] at Neh 2:18, Jerome perhaps reads ואמר (*et aio* "and I said"; LXX: καὶ εἶπα) rather than MT's וַיֹּאמְרוּ "and they said"; he translates Neh 3:20 as if his text reads ההרה (*in monte* "on the mount"; cf. LXX^{L}) rather than הֶחֱרָה "earnestly" of MT.[17]

19.3.6.4.2 Vocalization and *Ketiv*/*Qere*

V-Ezra–Neh usually conforms to the vocalization of MT (→ 19.2.2), but not in every case. For instance, Jerome apparently read the consonants נתן in Neh 2:12 as a perfect (*dedisset* "had put"; cf. LXX: δίδωσιν) rather than the participle of MT. As for the *Ketiv*/*Qere*, *BHQ* records fifty-two total instances for Ezra–Nehemiah, but in only thiry-one cases can a distinction be maintained in the Latin translation. V-Ezra–Neh follows the *Ketiv* in eight of these instances, and the *Qere* in the remaining twenty-three cases.[18]

Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle 1982*.

Janz, T., *Deuxième Livre d'Esdras: Traduction du texte grec de la Septante: Introduction et notes* (Bible d' Alexandrie 11.2; Paris: Cerf, 2010).

Marcus, D., *Ezra and Nehemiah* (*BHQ* 20; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

Williamson, H.G.M., *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco: Word Books, 1985).

Edmon L. Gallagher

19.3.7 Arabic Translations

19.3.7.1 Medieval Rabbanite Translations

Little is known in 2015 about the Jewish Arabic translations of the three last books of the Hebrew Bible, Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles. Despite their importance to biblical history, these books do not have liturgical or synagogue functions, and so they seem to have received less attention in ancient rabbinic circles, Jewish schoolrooms, and other learned groups.[1] Another possibility is that they did draw interest at a particular time and were translated into Arabic among learned Rabbanite circles (no differently than among the Karaite circles mentioned below) but that, due to the change in such interest or the limited social circle involved in their study, these translations were lost or not copied sufficiently.[2] The Arabic versions of these books are attested sparingly in manuscript sources and are rarely referred to in medieval Jewish literature. Medieval Karaite Jewish thinkers, however, who related to all parts of the Hebrew Bible as equally important in the derivation of Jewish law, gave more attention to Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles, as we shall show below. The great medieval Rabbanite translator, Saadia Gaon (882–942 C.E.), does not appear to have composed Arabic versions of these books.[3] Two short manuscripts that include a translation and a commentary on the books of Ezra and Chronicles are nonetheless attributed to Saadia Gaon. The first is catalogued as Fustāt 2000 at the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National and University Library of Jerusalem [= IMHM]. The manuscript originates from Egypt and it contains two pages of a translation and a commentary on Chronicles 34. The second is British Library manuscript Add. 27298, dating from the twelfth–thirteenth centuries C.E. [IMHM 6088]. It includes parts of a translation of and commentary on the books of Daniel (→ 18.3.7), Ecclesiastes (→ 13–17.1.8), and Ezra. Although some features in the Ezra translation concur with the translation system of Saadia Gaon, it is unclear whether the Gaon himself composed it or whether it was copied alongside other works attributed to him by students or copyists, and is essentially the product of an anonymous translator who may have

[15] See Janz, *Deuxième livre d' Esdras*, 225.

[16] Cf. Marcus, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 44*.

[17] See the discussion in Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle 1982*, 552–53.

[18] V-Ezra–Neh reflects the *Ketiv* at Ezra 2:1; 8:14, 17; 10:43; Neh 2:13; 7:52; 11:17; 12:16.

[1] Ratzaby, "Selections," 350; Ratzaby, *Saadia's Translation*, 8.

[2] Blau and Hopkins, "Ancient Bible," 4.

[3] For further on his translation enterprise, see → 1.3.6.

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been influenced by Saadia's versions.[4] In a surviving commentary on Chronicles attributed to one of Saadia's students, the commentator mentions Saadia's name six times, but does not mention that his teacher had written a commentary on Chronicles.[5] Further evidence may be gleaned from medieval book lists preserved in the Cairo Genizah that list many of Saadia's translation works, which were often collected or requested by private book owners or by vendors in the classical Genizah period (tenth to thirteenth centuries). None of these surviving lists attribute to him a translation and commentary on Nehemiah and Chronicles, yet one of them does list a *tafsīr daniel we-ʿezra le-rabbenu seʿadya* "a translation and commentary on Daniel and Ezra by our Rabbi Saadia."[6] Several scores of anonymous translation fragments of the three books have been identified in the Cairo Genizah Arabic and Judeo-Arabic collections.[7] It is possible that more exist and have not yet been identified. Usually, these Genizah fragments represent ad hoc translations, sometimes in popular style and sometimes more akin to Saadia's translation methodology.

Of a later period is the work of the Rabbanite commentator Rabbi Issāchār ben-Sūsān Hamaʿarāvī, who was born in Morocco and emigrated from Fez to Palestine, where he lived mostly in Safed. He composed an updated Arabic translation of the entire Hebrew Bible between 1570 and 1573, including the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.[8] The translation of these three books is found in manuscript Susan 160 [IMHM 9269]. Rabbi ben-Sūsān was influenced by Saadia Gaon's versions but wished to adapt them to the needs of his time. He cites the first word of each verse (the *incipit*) and follows it with a Judeo-Arabic translation that is closer to the vernacular of his time, and then with a lengthier commentary. Such pre-modern Judeo-Arabic works are known by the generic Arabic terms *sharḥ/shuruḥ*, i.e., explanative (interpretation/s). After each chapter, ben-Sūsān added a *bayān*, i.e., a clarification of difficult Hebrew words and various discussions.[9]

19.3.7.2 Medieval Karaite Translations

Medieval Karaite sources preserve more tangible evidence concerning Jewish interest in rendering these three books into Arabic than the Rabbanite translations:[10]

The earliest source is a one-page translation of Chronicles attributed to the founder of the Karaite school of learning in Jerusalem in the early tenth century, Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ. It is preserved in manuscript Evr. Arab. I 2635 of the Firkovich Collections in the Russian National Library, St. Petersburg [IMHM 55741].[11] In addition, various manuscripts containing parts of Yefet ben ʿEli's translations of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles (→ 20.3.8) are extant. This prolific commentator wrote a translation and commentary in Arabic on the entire Hebrew Bible during the second part of the tenth century. Yefet's entire translation and commentary on 1 Chronicles has survived in several manuscripts, while only parts of 2 Chronicles are extant. The most comprehensive manuscript is

[4] On the question whether Saadia translated the entire Hebrew Bible or only specific books or chapters, see Blau and Hopkins, "Ancient Bible," 4; Ratzaby, *Saadia's Translation*, 7; Ratzaby, "Seridīm," 169; Schlossberg, "The Spiritual Leadership," 222.

[5] See Kirchheim, *Ein Kommenator*.

[6] The title Ezra may include Nehemiah as well in Jewish sources. See Allony, *The Jewish Library*, 282. This specific Genizah fragment [TS MISC 36.134] contains a request to borrow books by a Bible scribe. The editors point out (see Allony, *The Jewish Library*, 282 n. 2) that this is the first time such a work is attributed to Saadia. In the appendix to the volume, there appear several other books entitled *tafsīr* in connection to Ezra and Chronicles (see Allony, *The Jewish Library*, 502–05) that are not attributed specifically to Saadia, and so they may reflect other translations and commentaries that were known at the time.

[7] See the indices in Baker and Polliack, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts* (2001); Shivtiel and Niessen, *Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts* (2006).

[8] For further on the pre-modern Judeo-Arabic Bible translations, see → 1.3.6.

[9] Doron, "From the Tafsir," 172–75; Doron, "On the Arabic Translation," 283–85; Doron, "Ben-Sūsān."

[10] For further on the Karaite translation enterprise, see → 1.3.6.

[11] On the Firkovich Collections and the Karaite school of learning in Jerusalem, see Goldstein, *Karaite Exegesis*, 1–14, and further references therein.

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kept in the private collection of I. Elisha in Lausanne, Switzerland [IMHM 50817]. The manuscript was copied in Egypt and contains 233 pages, including the translation and commentary of 1 Chronicles and the five initial chapters of 2 Chronicles. It has many erasures, however, as well as additions and duplications of words or groups of words, and sometimes it neglects to translate verses.

A more reliable translation is preserved in the Russian National Library manuscript Evr. Arab. I 1395 [IMHM 55018]. It is much shorter, containing 129 pages, which include the translation and commentary on 1 Chronicles (except for 1 Chr 1:1–32) and 2 Chronicles 1; 2; and 4. In this manuscript, the pages are jumbled in order, torn, and difficult to decipher; its apparent continuation is found in manuscript Evr. Arab. I 4321 of the Russian National Library [IMHM 62628], which contains truncated sections of Yefet's work on 2 Chronicles 8–15. Other manuscripts containing a few chapters from Yefet's translation and commentary of various sections of Chronicles have also been preserved in the same collection.[12]

In addition, the translations and commentaries of Yefet ben ʿEli on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are extant in various manuscript sources, none of which are complete.[13] Yefet's exegesis often draws on other works by Karaite scholars who preceded him or who belonged to the Jerusalem school during the ninth and tenth centuries C.E., such as Daniel al-Qūmisī, Salmon ben Yeruḥam, and David ben Boʿaz. It is likely that they also commented on verses from Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, and so sporadic translations from these books may be found in their vast exegetical and grammatical corpus. Nevertheless, no other independent and systematic Karaite translations and commentaries to these specific books have been uncovered so far. Mr. Yair Zoran is currently preparing an annotated critical edition and Hebrew translation of Yefet ben ʿEli's Arabic translation and Commentary on the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.

[12] These are also held in the Russian National Library, including manuscript Evr. Arab. II 3345 (IMHM 62675), which contains Yefet's work on 1 Chr 4:21–11:25; manuscriptEvr. I 4050 (IMHM 57750), which consists of thirty-two pages and includes his work on 1 Chronicles 20–21; 27–29; manuscript Evr. I 4250 (IMHM 57480) has fourteen pages and includes parts of Yefet's work on 2 Chr 11:17–15:7. Mr. Yair Zoran is preparing a critical edition of Yefet's translation and commentary on Chronicles.

[13] For manuscripts that are not included in the Firkovich Collections of the Russian National Library, see Tamani, "Repertorio"; Tamani, "Prolegomeni"; Tamani, "La tradizione." For material from the Firkovich Collections, see the catalogue of the manuscript library of the National Library of Israel: http://aleph.nli.org.il/.

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