

# The Hebrew Bible

Volume 1C  
*Writings*

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know him" (Job 24:1). Jerome appears to follow the *Ketiv* in Job 16:16 (v-Job 16:17), חמרמה "is red," since v-Job has the singular *intumuit* "is swollen," but this similarity is due to the fact that, "face" (*facies*) is singular in Latin, but plural in Hebrew. In Job 30:11, v-Job reads *faretram suam* "his quiver," reflecting the *Ketiv* יתרו.

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Jason Soenksen

### 11.3.8 Arabic Translations

#### 11.3.8.1 Saadia Gaon's Translation

Relatively<sup>1</sup> few Judeo-Arabic translations of the book of Job are known to date. Among these, some fragments have been identified in the Cairo Genizah collections, containing anonymous, early, or popular Jewish versions (see further below, → 11.3.8.3). By the tenth century, the need for standardization of the Arabic translations of the Bible, especially the Pentateuch, became pressing to the Jews. The most widespread translation of Job was prepared by Saadia (Gaon) b. Joseph al-Fayyumi (882–942 C.E.), at least as attested in Cairo Genizah sources. Saadia, who was born in Fayyum, Egypt, moved to Palestine in his youth and eventually settled in Iraq and became the Gaon of Sura (see Polliack's introductory survey → 1.3.6; and cf. Sasson's surveys on Proverbs → 12.3.8 and Psalms → 10.3.8). In Job, as in the Pentateuch, Saadia's versions are less literal than the early or popular Jew-

ish translations and Karaite versions, and they are more oriented towards the Arabic target language in their syntax and style.<sup>2</sup> Other features include a tendency to succinctness, theological alterations, shortening and expanding the text for stylistic purposes, and avoidance of repetitions. Saadia's intention was to produce a translation that remains faithful to the literal sense of the biblical text, yet takes into account the rules of the Arabic target language. Nonetheless, the rationalistic theology of his time was occasionally at odds with this goal. The end result was an interpretive translation, which in the case of the Pentateuch he called *tafsīr* (→ 1.3.6.3.1),<sup>3</sup> and in the case of Job he entitled *Kitāb al-Ta'dīl* "The Book of Theodicy." Extant manuscripts of Saadia's work on Job include his translation and commentary on the book and an extensive introduction, in which Saadia presents his doctrine on divine justice, just retribution, and the suffering of the righteous. In this, he sets out the wider interpretive framework for his translation and commentary on the book. Saadia maintains that God's grace is immeasurable, that it fills the entire universe, and that creation itself is proof of God's grace. Human suffering is caused not by a whimsical God, but rather it serves one of three purposes: The first is discipline and education, the second is punishment for transgression, and the third is the testing and examination of the righteous in order to reward them in the future, either in this world or the world to come. It is the third category to which Saadia classifies Job's suffering in this treatise *Iyov*.<sup>4</sup>

Saadia's translation and commentary is based on three assumptions: 1) the ultimate coherence of scripture; 2) the significance of every expression in the text; and 3) the veracity of the text.<sup>5</sup> Several principles characterize Saadia's translation and commentary. A literal translation is always preferred. Exceptions to this rule are only called for when a statement clashes with reason, when a phrase does not conform to the common use of

<sup>2</sup> Polliack, "Cairo Genizah"; Polliack, *Karaite*.

<sup>3</sup> Polliack, *Karaite*; Polliack, "Concept"; Polliack, "Cairo Genizah"; Sasson, "Arabic"; Steiner, *Biblical Translation*.

<sup>4</sup> Qafih (ed.), *Iyov*.

<sup>5</sup> Goodman, "Interpretive."

<sup>1</sup> The writing of this article was supported by the Israel Science Foundation, grant no. 410/10.

biblical language, or when tradition instructs us otherwise. Only in these instances is it permitted to interpret the text by means of metaphor.<sup>6</sup> Saadia sees it as his mission to find a rational explanation for every word in the Bible. He thus finds an equivalent term in Arabic for all the *hapax legomena* and to all geographical locations as well as all fauna and flora. In Saadia's Islamic rationalistic intellectual milieu, there is no room for mystical or mythological translation or interpretation of Job. Behemoth and Leviathan are natural beings and Uz is identified as a location in Syria near Damascus.<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Saadia does not allow for demons, monsters, or demigods in his translation. God is the absolute creator and the problem of Job is every person's problem.

Saadia exhibits great sensitivity to the poetic structure of the book of Job. This is demonstrated by his careful attempt to keep the size of lines in the translation the same as in the original text wherever possible. Saadia skillfully utilizes Arabic syntax, crafting it according to the original Hebrew text. Whenever possible he preserves the chiasmic relationship between lines. By adhering to the precise structure, Saadia enables the reader of his Arabic translation to appreciate the diction without compromise. Alliteration is a common device in biblical poetry. Saadia makes an effort to reflect this feature in his translation. Being a poet himself, Saadia pays close attention to sounds and therefore uses cognates whenever possible. One can almost feel a sense of competition between him and the Joban poet when he successfully comes up with five different Arabic synonyms for "lion" in Job 4:10–11. At the same time, Saadia's careful avoidance of anthropomorphism is demonstrated in his translation of Job. For example, the notion of God actively seeking Job in 7:21, "When You seek me, I shall be gone," is turned into the passive voice: "I will be sought for and will not be found." It is noteworthy here that even as Saadia is making a point of refraining from anthropomor-

phism, he skillfully achieves this goal by making a minimal change in vocalization that does not disrupt the poetic fabric. Furthermore, Saadia offers a glimpse into his thought process by adding a comment explaining why he chose the passive voice here. In his remark, he says that he replaced the (Masoretic) active voice with a passive Arabic construction because it is not possible to assume such an action by God (i.e. actively seeking a person). Saadia's upholding of reason reaches beyond his concern about God's corporality. Thus, human traits attributed metaphorically to inanimate objects or concepts are transformed in translation, losing their poetic (non-literal) sense: "Days" cannot possibly see, hence in Saadia's rendition of Job 9:25, "My days fly swifter than a runner; They flee without seeing good," it is not the days that "see no good" but rather "I (Job) did not see good in them (the days)." Furthermore, in an attempt to avoid poetic exaggeration Saadia adds a restrictive element and renders: "it is as if I did not see good in them." Saadia is usually very careful to preserve word pairs as they are, but is sometimes compelled by reason to alter them. For instance, in Job 12:8a, since earth is inanimate and cannot be spoken to, Saadia replaces "speak to the earth, it will teach you" with "converse with the wild animals of the earth." Adding "wild animals" to the translation is in fact "correcting" the poetics of the original Hebrew by providing a symmetrical parallel to "the fish of the sea" found in Job 12:8b. Similarly in Job 20:27, "Heaven will expose his iniquity; Earth will rise up against him," is translated into Arabic as "therefore will the folk of the heavens reveal his guilt, and the folk of the earth rise up against him." Thus "folk of the heavens" and "folk of the earth" are replacing "heavens" and "earth" in an attempt to avoid the personification of the inanimate heavens and earth.<sup>8</sup> Saadia's theology leaves no room for monsters, demons, and semigods. Hence Job 1:6, "One day the sons of God presented themselves before the Lord, and Satan came along with them," posits two problems for Saadia. The first is the concept of the sons of God and the second is Satan. Saadia

<sup>6</sup> Saadia, *Emunot*. An edition is provided by Qafih (ed.), *Sefer HaNivhar be-Emunot*.

<sup>7</sup> Goodman, "Interpretive."

<sup>8</sup> Rosenthal, "Exegesis."

translates sons of God as “the ones who worship God.” He bases his translation on Exod 4:22 and Deut 32:5 in which Israel is referred to as the sons of God. As for Satan, Saadia translates it as “adversary.” Saadia explains that Satan is in fact a human being. One of the texts upon which he bases his claim is 1 Kgs 11:14, in which Satan is an epithet for the enemy of King Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. Saadia explains that Satan cannot possibly be an angel because angels are devoid of any desire, be it good or bad, whereas Satan expresses an evil desire and therefore cannot be an angel.<sup>9</sup> It is possible to detect the influence of the Jewish Aramaic version (Targum [→ 11.3.3.1]) in Saadia’s translation. For instance, in Job 11:18 “entrenched” is translated as “you establish a house of burial” in the Targum. Influenced by the Targum, Saadia renders it in Arabic: “and when you build a house.” Similarly, in Job 22:8, “a man of (a strong) arm” is translated in the Targum as “a man of victory” and in Saadia’s translation as “the man of overpowering arm.” In these two examples, it is evident that Saadia does not prefer the Aramaic over the Hebrew but rather combines both to come up with his own version.<sup>10</sup> Modern scholarly editions of Saadia’s translation and commentary on the book of Job were published by Derenbourg (1879) and Qafih (1973).<sup>11,12</sup> An English translation of the work was published by Goodman (1988).<sup>13</sup>

### 11.3.8.2 Karaite Translations

Karaite Bible translations were motivated by the rejection of rabbinical authority and Jewish oral law. Most Karaite translations were written in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the golden age of Karaite literary activity. Karaites used the same orthographical standards as Saadia, yet their trans-

lations draw upon what appear to be earlier, pre-Saadian Jewish traditions.<sup>14</sup>

Yefet ben ‘Elī, the major Karaite translator and exegete and younger contemporary of Saadia, translated the entire Hebrew Bible into Judeo-Arabic during the second half of the tenth century, a translation that has survived in numerous manuscript sources (see → 1.3.6.3.2), alongside an extensive complementary commentary meant to be studied together with it. Nineteen manuscripts containing Yefet’s translation and commentary on Job are listed in the catalogue of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Israel National Library. Like Saadia, Yefet prefaced his work on each book of the Bible with an introduction in which he specified the nature of the book and his goals as a translator and exegete. Sharing with Saadia the Islamic rationalistic milieu of their time, Yefet discusses in his introduction to the book of Job aspects of divine justice, just retribution, and the suffering of the righteous. He too classifies Job’s suffering as the suffering of love, the suffering of the righteous whom God loves, the suffering that is to be rewarded in the future or in the world to come. In addition to the discussion of theodicy, Yefet lists thirteen benefits of the book of Job, that is, its educational and religious contributions. Several of these benefits relate to the supplying of information in the book about non-Israelite monotheists who lived in antiquity and congregated regularly to discuss and spread monotheism in the world. Other topics Yefet mentions include rhetorical patterns and possible manners in which to conduct theological debates, Satan’s *modus operandi*, and God’s greatness. The last contribution Yefet mentions is that God established in the book of Job the gracious memory of a righteous, noble, and learned person for posterity, as a universal model for righteous human behavior. Modern scholarly editions of Yefet’s translation and commentary on Job are only partial and include Ben-Shammai (1969) and Hussain (1986).<sup>15</sup> A full edition is now in the process of preparation by Arik Sadan.

<sup>9</sup> Saadia, *Version*. An edition is provided by Derenbourg (ed.), *Version arabe du livre de Job de Saadia Ben Iosef al-Fayyumi*.

<sup>10</sup> Rosenthal, “Exegesis.”

<sup>11</sup> Derenbourg (ed.), *Version arabe du livre de Job de Saadia Ben Iosef al-Fayyumi*; Qafih (ed.), *Iyov ‘im targum*.

<sup>12</sup> Derenbourg (ed.), *Version arabe du livre de Job de Saadia Ben Iosef al-Fayyumi*; Qafih (ed.), *Iyov ‘im targum*.

<sup>13</sup> Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy*.

<sup>14</sup> Polliack, *Karaite*.

<sup>15</sup> Ben-Shammai, “Editions and Versions in Yefet b. Ali’s

### 11.3.8.3 Other Translations

Several scores of anonymous translation fragments of Job have been identified in the Cairo Genizah Arabic and Judeo-Arabic collections. 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.<sup>16</sup>

A translation of Job is also attested in the sixteenth-century *sharḥ* by the Rabbanite commentator Rabbi Issāchār ben-Sūsān ha-Ma'arāvī, who was born in the city of Fez in Morocco and moved to Safed at a young age. Ben-Sūsān proclaimed the necessity of updating Saadia's Bible version in the comprehensible Arabic of his time (→ 1.3.6; → 3–5.1.8; → 6–9.1.8).

According to David Sklare of the Israel National Library, who graciously shared the following as-yet unpublished information, Salmon ben Yeruḥam, the tenth-century Karaite exegete, wrote a commentary on Job, presumably accompanied by a translation. Salmon mentions his work on Job in his translations and commentaries on Lamentations and Ecclesiastes. No manuscript containing this work has been identified as yet. Sklare suggests that Tanḥum ben Yoseph ha-Yerushalmi, the fourteenth-century Rabbanite exegete and grammarian, included a commentary on Job in his work *Kitāb al-Bayyān*. In addition, Sklare relays that the undated manuscript SP RNL EVR ARAB I 3812 contains a translation and commentary on Job. At the beginning of the manuscript, there is a flyleaf written in a different hand than the rest of the document. It includes a statement that it is a summary epitome (*talkhīs*) by Aharon ben David HaCohen based on the works of Salmon ben Ruḥaym (Salmon ben Yeruḥam), al-Sijilmāsi, Yehudah ben Quraysh, Abu Sa'īd Levi ben al-Hasan al-Baṣri (Levi ben Yefet), and Abu Ya'qūb Yusuf ibn Nūḥ, and compared with the

work of Saadia. Presumably the reference to Yehudah ben Quraysh and Levi ben Yefet points to their grammatical works. Al-Sijilmāsi is the unknown author of an unknown commentary on Job.

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<sup>16</sup> See the indices in Baker and Polliack, *Catalogue*; Shvitzel and Niessen, *Catalogue*.

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