Bible Translation

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Between Text and Commentary: A Characteristic Feature of Jewish Bible Versions

Abstract: Jewish versions of the Bible frequently feature extensive commentaries in addition to translated text. In many instances these commentaries elicit as much attention as the translation itself—if not more. Typically combining grammatical and exegetical remarks, these commentaries accompany both freer and more literal renderings and may contain non-Jewish and non-traditional commentators along with substantial offerings from mainstream Jewish exegetes. The erudition displayed by these Jewish translators is extensive, often aimed at a more learned audience than the translated text itself. Overall, such Jewish versions may be seen as efforts to open up for non-Hebrew readers the intentionally ambiguous language of the original, where lexical and grammatical multivalence are characteristic features—features that are frequently lost when rendering words and expressions from one language to another.

In a prominent review of Robert Alter's translation of the Pentateuch, distinguished American author John Updike complains of the "sheer amount of accompanying commentary and philological footnotes" that accompanied the translated text itself. In this regard (as well as in others) he compares Alter unfavorably to "the fifty-four churchmen and scholars" who supplied "English readers with a self-explanatory [English] text"; that is, the King James Version. Continuing with his observations, Updike speaks of what he terms the "overload of elucidation [that Alter] imposed upon the basic text." For Updike, it is "Alter's more academic and literary commission [that] allows him to luxuriate in the forked possibilities of the Hebrew text."[1]

But here Updike is disingenuous at best, downright prejudiced at worst. As a well-known observer of and participant in Protestant America, Updike liked his Bible commentary-free. But Jewish translations, as Updike was bound to know, have almost always been accompanied by commentary; in fact, many were subservient to the commentary. This was true with Saadiah Gaon in Arabic, Moses Mendelssohn in German, Leopold Zunz and David Philippson in German, Samson Raphael Hirsch also in German, Samuel Cahen in French, Samuel David Luzzatto in Italian, and Richard Eliot Friedman in English, among many others. In fact, I sometimes think that the Aramaic text of the Targumim, as transmitted to us, is a result of commentary incorporated into the text rather than under or beside it.

Be that as it may, this approach to Bible translating is, at it were, an answer to the reproach of those Talmudic rabbis who criticized the Septuagint or, more broadly, those who emphasized what translations

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[1] Updike, "The Great I Am."

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could never be, instead of acknowledging the unique value of this process. We will feature specific examples of such critiques in the closing paragraphs of this article.

Saadiah Gaon: Bible Translation into Arabic

Saadiah ben Yosef al-Fayyumi Gaon was born in 882 at a site in Lower Egypt. Few details are known of his upbringing and early life in Egypt. However, it appears that from a relatively young age he profited from an education that combined traditional Jewish learning with fields of study, such as philosophy and grammar, in which Islamic scholars excelled. It may even be that Saadiah began his first attempts at Bible translation while still living in Egypt.

At some point, not later than 915, Saadiah moved to Palestine. While there, he sided with the Babylonian leadership in a significant calendrical dispute between them and the Palestinian authorities. This was one of the reasons, along with acknowledged erudition, why six years later he was welcomed into Babylonia. In 928 he was selected as gaon (that is, head) of the Sura academy, one of the two major centers of learning among Babylonian Jews. For political and family reasons, Saadiah was forced to step down as gaon in 932, only to be re-installed at a later period. It is generally agreed that the majority of Saadiah's efforts at Bible translation took place during the always busy, often tumultuous years of his residence in Babylonia.[2] He died in 942.

For Saadiah, it was important that the three major intellectual emphases of his life—the Bible (Written and Oral), Rabbanite (as opposed to Karaite) exegesis and interpretation of the biblical text,[3] and philosophy—stand together, such that the insights from one branch of learning would not contradict those obtained through the other two. Among the major goals of Saadiah's Arabic version of the Bible, then, was the demonstration that, when properly understood, no passage of the Bible contradicted any other passage, any element of traditional exegesis, or any tenet of the philosophical system that Saadiah had constructed.[4]

Saadiah himself referred to his work with the Arabic term *tafsir*, which aligns more closely to our word "commentary" than to "translation."[5] And indeed Saadiah initially composed his "translation" as the starting point for his often extensive and digressive commentary. It appears that even during his lifetime, the "translation" part of his "commentary" began to appear separately (either in its original or in a revised form) for purposes of

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2 In his influential work, *Saadiah Gaon: His Life and Works*, 141-142, Henry Malter states: "In all probability [Saadiah] began while he was still in Egypt, to make translations of Biblical books accompanied with commentaries and continued this work in the following periods of his vicissitudinous life, changing, correcting, and enlarging the exegetical portions as his knowledge increased." In the view of Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 77), "It is likely Saadiah began composing his Arabic Bible versions after leaving Egypt, possibly while residing in Tiberias."
3 The term "Rabbanite," virtually synonymous with the broader designation "rabbinic," is often used to distinguish the mainstream of Jewish leadership and thought from the Karaites, a significant rival group during this time period. Karaites did not accept the authority or the interpretations of Rabbanite Judaism, preferring to rely on their understanding of the Hebrew Bible, an understanding based on the careful reading of the text by each individual.
4 Thus, L. E. Goodman ("Saadiah Gaon's Interpretive Technique in Translating the Book of Job," 55) speaks of "three assumptions [that] orient Saadiah's exegetical method as a translator...(a) the ultimate coherence of the scriptural canon, (b) the significance and intelligibility of the text, and (c) the veracity of the text. All of these are corollaries of the divine inspiration of the Torah."More expansively, David M. Freidenreich ("The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's *Tafsir* of the Torah," 393) enumerates "the five objectives of Saadiah in writing the *Tafsir:* To provide an Arabic rendering of the 'plain sense of Torah,' to educate and guide the assimilated masses of his day, to provide a translation of the Torah in accord with reason, to provide a translation of the Torah in accord with rabbinic tradition, to refute heretical and Karaite beliefs."On this, Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 86) writes: "Saadiah's translation methodology was bound up with his general scheme of scriptural interpretation. This scheme was meant to harmonize between the revealed text of Scripture and other sources of human knowledge. It enabled the Hebrew Bible to be presented as a text which withstands the test of logic, and so came to the defence of traditional Jewish faith whose precepts were being undermined at the time by members of other religions, agnostics and heretics. The need to draw rabbinic tradition into this interpretive system...was mostly a reaction against the Karaite adherence to Scripture alone as the only binding source for Jewish religious practice."
5 Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 86: "Saadiah's awareness of the interpretive nature of his translation of the Pentateuch may explain its designation as *tafsir*, a term which better conveys this sense than the term *tarjamah* [which usually describes a simple, straightforward translation]."

popular consumption, inasmuch as the "translation" with "commentary" would have been a bulky work (both physically and intellectually). But, in fact, even the general reader had, probably unknowingly, considerable access to Saadiah's exegetical prowess, since interpretive renderings—which indeed would have been explained in some detail in the formal commentary—found their way into the text itself.

Thus, in Genesis 6:2 the "sons of God" become "sons of nobles"; their coupling, then, is not a matter of divine beings/angels and humans, but rather a mixture of human classes. Admittedly, the first verses of Genesis 6 in the Hebrew stimulate all sorts of speculation. For Saadiah, however, that speculation was not necessary. And readers of his text would likewise be spared such concerns—after all, the Arabic lacked the intentional ambiguity of the Hebrew.[6] In like manner, Job's adversary (not Adversary) was a mere mortal. See for example, his rendering of Job 1:6: "When it was the day that God's beloved came and presented themselves before Him, Job's adversary was present along with them." This was in keeping with Saadiah's view that all occurrences of the Hebrew term "satan" referred to a human.[7] (Cf. JPS85 with, "One day the divine beings presented themselves before the Lord, and the Adversary came along with them.") Because of relevant statements in extant remnants of Saadiah's commentary, we need not speculate about the motives for Saadiah's renderings in these instances.

In making such judgments about the meanings of Hebrew words, Saadiah was drawing upon the deep knowledge he had acquired in preparing a Hebrew-Arabic dictionary. And this was but one of his achievements in the field of lexicography and more broadly language studies.[8] At times, we may wonder whether Saadiah was a bit too clever for his own good, as when he substituted "Healing Tree" for the well-known phrase, "the tree of knowledge" at Genesis 3:24. But he did so consciously, basing himself on the multiple meanings that the Hebrew root could, in his opinion, take.[9]

His search for the meaning of words, coupled with his demonstrable eagerness to insure a text that was easily apprehended by his intended audience, led Saadiah to provide translations for many proper nouns, where other translators and commentators (both ancient and modern) would simply include transliterations. Thus, Beer-Sheba is rendered as the "well of Seven" and Kiriath arba (the original, or at least earlier, name of Hebron) is the "City of Four."[10] Already in his lifetime or shortly thereafter this practice of Saadiah's, buttressed by argumentation in his commentary, was commented upon, generally without favor. But, in fact, it coincides and complements his concern for providing his readers with a clear understanding; at least they would not have to wrestle with the meaning of "sheba" ("seven" or "oath") in the place name Beer-Sheba.

Saadiah's insistence that the Bible be consistent with philosophy must be understood broadly, as at Genesis 3:20. Surely, all attentive readers of the Hebrew text (and almost all of its translations) recognize that there is a bit of a misstatement or overstatement in the characterization of Eve as the mother of all the living. Such readers can arrive, on their own accord, at some explanation, be it literary, linguistic, or lexical. Saadiah, as it were, could not imagine that the biblical text would contain an image that was inconsistent with (in this case, common) knowledge. Thus, Saadiah's text, intended as the standard Arabic version, has no such image: "And he named his wife Eve for she was the mother of all the living that are rational and mortal."[11]

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6 For Saadiah's own comments on the meaning of this passage, see Linetsky, *Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation*, 207. Freidenreich ("The Use of Islamic Sources," 378) observes that here Saadiah was "following Onkelos' lead."

7 For this observation, see especially Goodman, *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job by Saadiah ben Joseph al-Fayyumi*, 153-155.

8 So, for example, a work of his, *'Agron* (meaning, a collection of words), dated to 913, is the first known Hebrew lexicon. See Greenslade, *Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present*, 3:523.

9 In Linetsky's rendering of Saadiah's commentary at this point (*Saadiah Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation*, 164), Saadiah remarked that he translated the Hebrew expression "as 'Healing Tree' for the word *Hayyim* in our language can mean [one of] eight things"; "healing" is one of those eight things.

10 On these two passages—Genesis 21:14 and Genesis 23:2—and their parallels, see Linetsky, *Saadiah Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation,* 300 and 316-318, respectively.

11 Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources," 356-357 n. 11, where Gen 3:20 is cited as one of "Saadiah's examples of non-rational verses that require interpretation." As observed in the commentary: "Eve is not 'the mother of all the living' but merely 'the mother of all the living that are rational and mortal.'"

Expressions Saadiah deemed apt for "correction" often exhibit a mixture between internal (that is, intra-biblical) inconsistency and failure to adhere to rational observation. That is the case with Genesis 3:20. On the other hand, the next instance—the much-discussed curse uttered by Noah in Genesis 9—focuses on concerns, admittedly weighty, exclusively within the biblical text itself. As recorded in the MT, it is Canaan who is cursed (Gen 9:25). But, we may well ask, why is Canaan cursed, when it was his father, Ham, who failed to observe proper decorum when confronted with his father's (that is, Noah's) naked body? Saadiah neatly bypasses this interpretive difficulty by having Noah curse not Canaan, but Canaan's father—that is, Ham—who was the guilty party. But Saadiah being Saadiah could not simply pull this solution out of his exegetical hat. He noted, as we may also do, that each time Ham is mentioned earlier in chapter 9, he is identified as the father of Canaan. In effect, Saadiah surmised, "father of Canaan" functioned as Ham's surname. A parallel in Arabic would be Abu Ishaq. Thus, the cursing of Canaan by Noah was not aimed at his seemingly blameless grandson, but rather at his completely guilty son, here referred to solely through the surname by which he was known.[12] As is true in other cases as well, we may be intrigued by Saadiah's reasoning—laid out in his commentary—even when we are not convinced by his logic.

One further example can be adduced, one that is especially useful for providing us with concrete evidence of how Saadiah dealt with internal inconsistencies. At Deuteronomy 6:16, the Hebrew text offers this admonition: "Do not try the Lord your God, as you did at Massah." This seems to be in tension with the divine invitation offered at Malachi 3:10: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the Lord of Hosts." For Saadiah, such tension between one biblical passage and another could not be allowed to stand. Basing himself on a third biblical text, "To test God was in their mind" (Ps 78:18), he determined that the distinguishing feature was the people's intention. As he explicates in his commentary, it was permissible to test the powers of God, but not to challenge him as an expression of doubt or denial. The use of a third passage to clear up apparent inconsistencies between two others was a long-standing rabbinic approach when dealing with matters of law or halachah. Saadiah expanded this practice to include all of the biblical text, halachic or narrative (aggadah). As such, he insisted on the thoroughgoing coherence and integration of all Scripture.[13]

Quantitatively, and perhaps also qualitatively, one of the most characteristic features of Saadiah's translating can be observed in the many examples that relate to anthropomorphic and anthropopathic attributions to God. Like those who produced the Targums (on which he was explicitly dependent in many instances), Saadiah sought to avoid the attribution of human characteristics—physical and emotional alike—to Israel's deity.

In line with this understanding, Saadiah could not accept the imagery of God, or God's heart, being sad (as at Gen 6:6) or, at the opposite end of the emotional scale, of God's laughing (as at Ps 2:4). As he reflects upon in his commentary, here Saadiah retains God as subject and then makes use of the causative form and meaning of the Hebrew verb. In this and in parallel cases, Saadiah does rather decisively change the basic understanding of the clause, especially at Psalm 2:4: "He who is enthroned in heaven laughs" (MT); "He who dwells in heaven makes [people] laugh" (Saadiah). Shielding his readers from a serious flaw in their understanding of God appears to be a far more pressing concern of his than mechanically rendering the source text.[14]

For the most part, the examples we have been looking at this far pertain to Saadiah's goals with respect to individual words and phrases. In this regard, it has been demonstrated that in his commentaries (as well as in other sources) Saadiah articulated his desire to produce a text that was in conformity with the Hebrew Bible itself, rabbinic exegetical traditions, and reason. Any Hebrew word or phrase that as much as hinted at a rift in this unified structure needed modification through addition, omission, and/or replacement.

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12 Linetsky, *Saadiah Gaon's Commentary on the Book of Creation*, 228, for Saadiah's procedure here.

13 On these passages, see Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources," 357 n. 11, and especially, "Saadiah Gaon's Interpretive Technique," 52.

14 See Halkin, "Saadiah's Exegesis and Polemics,"126, for Genesis 6:6 and Psalm 2:4. For the Psalm passage, Freidenreich ("The Use of Islamic Sources," 356) observes: As Saadiah explains in his commentary on Ps 2:4, "verbs of action which refer to God, such as 'He descended,' 'He went up,' are rationally inadmissible and have to be transferred to agents and to be translated 'He made one descend,' 'He caused someone to go up.'"

In all of this, Saadiah was self-consciously—and through his commentary, explicitly—constructing a rendering of the plain sense of the text (as he understood it) that would be easily accessible for his intended audience, which seems to have consisted of individuals who had at best a sketchy appreciation for the Bible in Hebrew but at the same time enjoyed a rather full immersion into the Islamic culture of their day. To use an image that enjoys currency among contemporary translation scholars, Saadiah brought his source text to the reader rather than bringing the reader to the source text.[15] To put it another way, Saadiah placed primary importance on conveying the message of the text (as he understood it) in Arabic rather than on maintaining distinctive features of the Hebrew at the expense of a free-flowing Arabic.[16]

In today's parlance, we can speak of Saadiah's translation in terms of functional rather than formal equivalence. In other words, Saadiah sought to determine how a given phrase or unit of text functioned in the Hebrew Bible and then to fashion an Arabic that would express the same thing for his audience.[17] In the process, Saadiah jettisoned characteristic forms of biblical Hebrew in favor of structures that were native to written and spoken Arabic.[18] On a continuum of translations, with "literal" being at one end and "free" at the other, Saadiah's rendering clearly occupies a place among the "free" versions.[19]

It was perhaps in the nature of Saadiah's position as gaon, and, I suspect, also in keeping with his forceful personality, that Saadiah set out to establish his text as the standard Arabic version rather than as one of many provisional renderings.[20] In keeping with this sought-after status, as we noted above, he rid the biblical text of ambiguities, offering a single explanation and leaving no room, literally or figuratively,

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15 Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*) convincingly demonstrates that this forms a key contrast between Saadiah's version and those produced under Karaite auspices. Thus, she writes: "Saadiah, on the other hand [contra the Karaite practice of trying to reflect 'the form as well as the function of the source text'] is primarily concerned with securing an equivalency of function between the source text and the translated text, and often rejects a translation option which preserves the form of the source text, even when it is perfectly functional in the Arabic target language" (244). Further: "The difference may be formulated as follows: the Karaites pursue an A for A model of translation, which involves the use of as many parallel structures as possible between Hebrew and Arabic....Saadiah prefers a B for A model of translation, which makes use of structures indigenous to the Arabic target language whenever possible, yet does not refrain from using existing parallel structures when these best express the function of a source language feature in a particular context" (248, n. 6).
16 As Halkin ("Saadiah's Exegesis and Polemics," 124) notes, in preparing his translation, Saadiah was not "obsessed by [a] sense of slavishness to the Hebrew....On the contrary, his primary canon was that the Bible must read like an understandable, rationally tenable book." Or, as Malter (*Saadiah Gaon,* 143) explicates at greater length: In his translation, Saadiah's "chief thought was to make the Bible a book accessible to all; to present the Scriptures in a rational, intelligible form. Hence he does not always bind himself to the rules of the Masorah, to grammar, or to common usage; but aiming at the greatest possible clearness and consistency, he often disregards all difficulties arising from rule and custom. He does not hesitate to insert words and phrases, or to divide and connect verses and sentences in his own way, when necessary to convey to the reader the intended sense. To this extent his translation is at the same time an interpretation, and Saadiah, being himself well aware of the fact, called it *tafsir,* which means both commentary and translation."
17 Goodman, "Saadiah Gaon's Interpretive Technique," 47-48: "The key to understanding Saadiah's biblical translation is the recognition that the gaon translates for referential sense. It is not his desire or intent to preserve the figures or idioms of biblical Hebrew except insofar as corresponding usages in the host language, Arabic, may shed light on the intended use." More broadly, see the influential de Waard and Nida, *From One Language to Another.*
18 Among other examples, along the lines of those adduced above, was Saadiah's translation of the Hebrew *kohen* (priest) by the Arabic term *imam,* which was part of Saadiah's goal to produce "a target text which is oriented toward the language and culture of the reader" (Freiderich, "The Use of Islamic Sources," 362).
19 As Margolis (*The Story of Bible Translations*, 53-54) observes, "Though not a paraphrase, [Saadiah's] version is by no means literal. Where necessary a word is added to bring out the sense clearly; several verses are frequently joined together in a syntactical nexus, and thus, though the original coloring is lost, the translation gains in lucidity. With a view to the same end a positive Arabic equivalent is introduced where the meaning of the Hebrew is doubtful, in order not to awaken in the laity the thought that there are obscure expressions in the Scriptures."
20 Succinctly put, "at the core of [Saadiah's] approach lay an attempt to create an independent Arabic version which functioned, for its readers, in place of the Hebrew Pentateuch and not alongside it" (Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation,* 272-73).

for dissenting views.[21] The Cairo Genizah has yielded some fragments of Judeo-Arabic translations prior to Saadiah.[22] Saadiah made use of some elements of "the popular tradition reflected in these translations.... while at the same time, he changed some of their popular traits, particularly, their verbal echoing of the Hebrew source text. In doing so, he produced a standard Arabic version which had canonizing force and so could be used across different Jewish communities in various contexts."[23] Thus, his efforts were in some ways parallel to those of Jerome, who was initially presented with the task of bringing some order into the older Latin renderings circulating during his lifetime.

At the same time, Saadiah's eyes were focused primarily on his present circumstances and probably also, to an extent, on the future. Here his principal adversaries were the Karaites, who denied to the rabbis a monopoly on biblical interpretation, as well as much else, and sought to produce a series of versions that would promote their understanding of the "uninterpreted" biblical text in a style that would combine salient features of the Hebrew with familiar characteristics of the Arabic. This helps to explain the repeated insistence on the correctness of the rabbanite (or rabbinic) interpretation or application of the Bible in Saadiah's commentary. Undoubtedly, in this extended and extensive enterprise, Saadiah found allies among his fellow Rabbanites.

Moving beyond Saadiah's own lifetime, the *Tafsir* did indeed maintain the preeminent place among Arabic-speaking Jews that Saadiah had sought for it. It was frequently copied, in whole or in part, for a considerable period of time.[24] During the process, we can well imagine, mistakes of omission as well as addition occurred. According to some scholars, wherever an alternative rendering is introduced in the text or the commentary, this is a sure sign of a copyist's addition, for, as we observed above, Saadiah himself sought to present *The Bible* in Arabic, not just one among many.[25]

Those who seek to do research on Saadiah's Bible version are presented with a formidable task when it comes to locating extant evidence. It is possible, even likely, that Saadiah produced two different translations for the books of the Torah, and it has been speculated that he followed the same practice with many, if not all, of the remaining books of the Bible.[26] If this is indeed the case, then it is likely that portions of the two versions were mixed together early on in their transmission history.

One of the two versions (if indeed there were two distinct versions of Saadiah's translation) was intended to form part of a commentary. From evidence that does remain, it is clear that Saadiah's commentary notes were frequently lengthy, complicated, and always learned. In this context, the translation itself could almost get lost. And in fact we do have sections of Saadiah's commentary with translation as well as copies

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21 In this vein, Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*) writes: "The complete absence of [lexical] alternatives in Saadiah's translation [that is, in the text and commentary] captures more than any other feature the striking difference between his approach and that of the Karaites" (264). And: The Karaites leave "the choice between several translation options open to the reader" (267). Further: "Saadiah was sharply aware of the need to consolidate standard Arabic versions of the Pentateuch and possibly of other books of the Hebrew Bible. His concept and practice of translation developed in relation to this need....For this reason, Saadiah's *Tafsir* contains no translation alternatives. This cannot be otherwise, since it is meant to function as a closed self-contained version of the Pentateuch in Arabic" (272).

22 Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 10) speaks of this: "The Bible translations composed by Saadiah Gaon...were considered for a long period the earliest Arabic versions of Jewish provenance. Although it was generally assumed he had not produced them *ex nihilo*, there was no proof for his reliance on pre-existing Jewish sources. Recently, however, some of these have come to light in the form of several Genizah fragments which contain Judaeo-Arabic translations from Proverbs, the Pentateuch and other books of the Hebrew Bible. These fragments date to the ninth century.... Factors suggest that the Genizah fragments represent early attempts by Jews to put down in writing their Arabic translations of the Hebrew Bible."

23 Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 10, 13.

24 "Saadiah's students concentrated on completing their master's work with regard to the commentary on the Pentateuch, yet did not attempt novel translations" (Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation of Arabic Bible Translation,* 80, n. 61).

25 Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation,* 268 n. 19.

26 Specifically on the Torah, Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation,* 78-79) writes: "As to the number of Pentateuch translations Saadiah may have produced, considerable confusion is prevalent, which results from two independent factors. The first concerns Saadiah's statement in the Introduction that he was asked to compile a short *tafsir* on the Pentateuch after he had already written a long *tafsir* on the Pentateuch. The short *tafsir* appears to have consisted of his translation alone, without the commentary....The long *tafsir,* which included the commentary, was eventually dropped from common usage."

of his translation without commentary. Since the translation and commentary were aimed at somewhat different audiences, with the latter meant to attract solely the intellectual elite, this phenomenon is not altogether surprising.[27]

As noted before, there are scholars who posit that Saadiah began his translation activities while still in Egypt. Most experts would acknowledge that, whether or not Saadiah began his translation in Egypt, he was active in this enterprise during his stay in Palestine, perhaps at Tiberias. Notwithstanding disputes about the starting date, the evidence, internal as well as external, supports the view that most of Saadiah's *Tafsir* was produced in Babylonia. In many respects this is extraordinary, given the extensive amount of time Saadiah necessarily devoted to his role as a senior religious leader not only in Babylonia, but worldwide.

It is now generally conceded that Saadiah wrote his Arabic-language *Tafsir* in Hebrew script. If this is so, he would have been intentionally excluding a sizable number of non-Jews, for only a highly educated Muslim elite would have the ability or the inclination to tackle a work not written in Arabic script.

As for Jews, "the translation swiftly gained the status of an Authorized Arabic version of the Pentateuch amongst Rabbanite communities....The authority of the *Tafsir* and its popular acceptance as a definitive text discouraged the writing of other translations of the Pentateuch, which explains their general absence from medieval Rabbanite sources."[28]

In these matters, as in so many others, Saadiah contributes bountifully to any serious discussion of Jewish translations of the Bible. We will have occasion, in the next section, to remark that Moses Mendelssohn, in the first edition of his German translation, made use of Hebrew script; only later was his influential version (re-) produced using German script. We will also have the opportunity to see how in his approach to producing a translation, Mendelssohn's thoughts did not stray far from the centrality of the interplay between commentary and text in his published works.

Moses Mendelssohn and the First Translation into German

Martin Luther produced his landmark German version of the Bible in the early sixteenth century, laboring on the Old Testament from 1522 to 1534. It was not until the last quarter of the eighteenth century that the Jewish community was to have its own translation of the Bible in German.

As part of Luther's efforts to reform Christianity, he shaped a German text characterized by forceful language and direct diction. A literary masterpiece against which all subsequent German Bibles would be measured, Luther's version reflected some elements of the Jewish interpretive tradition—in his case, the medieval exegete Rashi, as refracted through Christian sources (primarily, Nicholas de Lyra), influenced him more than he would probably have been comfortable admitting.[29]

Approximately two and a half centuries after Luther, the Jewish intellectual and Enlightenment leader Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) sought to remedy what he saw as the deplorably low status of Bible versions

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27 For Polliack (*The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 79-80), these developments are best situated in the following contexts: "The question still remains, however, whether both works [i.e., the long and the short *tafsir*] contained the same translation text, or whether Saadiah changed his translation when he adapted it into a self-contained work....At an early stage of its [i.e., Saadiah's translation-commentary of the Pentateuch] transmission...an unusual split occurred between the translation and commentary portions of this particular work....This process led to the neglect of his commentary on the Pentateuch which eventually ceased to be copied."

28 Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 80.

29 Hence the origin of the following epigram: "Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltasset (Si Lyre n'avait pas joué de la lyre, Luther n'aurait pas dansé)." (Cited from http://www.exposition-biblique.com, which also contains a succinct analysis [in French] of de Lyra's pervasive influence on Luther.) Commenting on this phenomenon in his characteristically succinct manner, Margolis (*The Story of Bible Translations*, 56) writes: "Rashi's commentary was excerpted in Latin by the apostate Nicholas de Lyra (died 1340) whose 'Postillae Perpetuae,' printed in 1471-2, exercised a potent influence on Luther's German translation of the Bible."

available to his fellow German-speaking Jews.[30] Elite cultural and social circles were at last opening up to them. But how, he asked, could members of this burgeoning bourgeoisie gain admittance, if they remained unacquainted with the High German style spoken and written by the Christian leadership of his day? Mendelssohn's version of the Bible and the accompanying commentary—the first Jewish translation into the German language (rather than Judeo-German or Yiddish)—produced by himself and others whom he inspired, served as one of his responses to this question.[31]

The publication of Mendelssohn's translations of the Bible began with his version of Ecclesiastes (1770), followed by his Pentateuch (1783), Psalms (1785-91), and Song of Songs (1788). Various scholars collaborated with Mendelssohn on other books while he was alive and continued in his style and with his goals after his death. A complete edition of the Bible by Mendelssohn and his followers appeared in the mid-1830s. It was often reprinted thereafter.

Mendelssohn accepted much of the language of the by-then classic formulations of Martin Luther, while at the same time excluding all of the specifically Christian renderings Luther had formulated. This can be profitably observed, for example, in their respective versions of the Psalter and Ecclesiastes. In support of his Jewish renderings, Mendelssohn marshaled an array of Jewish commentators, whose insights he characteristically collected in the commentaries he himself assembled. As Saadiah's Arabic translations had been, the first editions of Mendelssohn's version, called the *Biur,* were printed in Hebrew characters. In this important sense, then, Mendelssohn's goal was to increase knowledge among Jews about Judaism, as much as it was to enhance social, cultural, and political opportunities for Jews in the larger world. In this regard, Max L. Margolis wrote:

> [Mendelssohn's work] served as a text-book for acquiring the language of the educated, which led naturally to familiarity with the German literature and German culture. Then again inwardly it wrought a change by luring away the youth from the narrower occupation with codes and casuistry to the wider field of biblical interpretation and to the appreciation of the Scriptures as literature demanding and creating an aesthetic taste.[32]

As with Saadiah's *Tafsir,* the primary meaning of the term *Biur* is commentary rather than translation. Even though Mendelssohn's work—translation and commentary in German, sometimes accompanied by the Masoretic Text—is commonly referred to as the *Biur,* it bears a title, *Book of the Paths of Peace.* Its introduction is called "Light for the Path."[33] The work's title is an allusion to Proverbs 3:17, while "Light for the Path" recalls Psalm 119:105.[34]

We can at least in part feel the intensity of Mendelssohn's dedication to these goals by looking at some of his writings on this topic, which often began as portions of his running commentary before being pulled from this context and expanded in later works. He bemoans the fact that since the proliferation of Judeo-German versions, "no-one has taken to heart to emend this perversion and to translate the Holy Torah into the proper and accustomed language generally used in our generation. Jewish children who desire 'to perceive words of understanding' 'run to and fro seeking the word of the Lord' [see Prov 1:2 and Amos 8:12, respectively] from Christian Scholars."[35] This pedagogical interest on Mendelssohn's part is fully in keeping with the origins of his translation: he initially undertook the project to instruct his sons.[36]

And what do Jews (children and adults) imbibe when seeking spiritual sustenance from Christian sources? Alas, Mendelssohn concludes, very little, if anything, of value:

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30 The Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah was a European movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its starting and ending dates are, therefore, later than those of what is commonly called the Age of Enlightenment, although there were substantial chronological, geographical, and intellectual overlaps between these two movements and their leaders.

31 Among the many full-length studies of Mendelssohn and his multi-faceted accomplishments are Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*; and Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity*.

32 Margolis, *The Story of Bible Translations,* 86.

33 Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 53.

34 Ibid., 175.

35 Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment*, 158.

36 Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*, 53.

> Christian translators—who do not have the traditions of our Sages, and who do not heed the words of the Masorah, not even accepting the vowel points and accents that we have—make the words of the Torah into a broken wall. Everyone goes out against [the Masorah] and does with it as he pleases [for this expression, see Dan 11:16]; they add and delete and change the divine Torah. [This affects] not only the points and the accents, but sometimes even letters and words (for who will stop their vanity?) according to what they think and feel. As a result, they occasionally do not read what is written in the Torah, but that which occurs to them.[37]

As harshly critical as Mendelssohn is in his suggestion that Christian scholars are prone to far-fetched and random emendation of the biblical text, he ultimately realizes that differing methodologies are not the primary distinction between Jewish and Christian translators (and translations) of the Bible. Rather, Jews and Christians read and interpret the Bible in fundamentally different ways. He notes:

> I do not censure those scholars [for their critical approaches], for what should compel them to heed the tradition which they did not receive from their forefathers or the Masorah which was not transmitted to them from trustworthy men? They do not accept the words of the Torah to preserve and fulfill all that is written there.[38]

That task, that sacred task, could be undertaken only by Jews:

> For us, the Torah is an inheritance...to know the commandments that God commanded us to learn and teach, to preserve and fulfill, for it is our life and length of our days [see Deut 30:20]. In order that our lives not be hanging on the hairbreadth of conjecture or the thread of reflection alone, our Sages decreed for us the Masorah and erected a fence for the Torah and for the commandments, for decrees and laws, in order that we not grope like the blind in the dark [for this image, see Isa 59:10]....We do not live from the mouth [of...an emendator], but from that which our trustworthy masters of the Masorah transmitted to us.[39]

Nonetheless, Mendelssohn's work was from its inception controversial within the Jewish community. Many of its leaders feared that their students, once introduced to High German through Mendelssohn's rendering, would abandon the Jewish texts that they had traditionally studied in favor of works that formed part of the German literary canon. Mendelssohn, like Saadiah, sought the plain meaning of the text (Mendelssohn used the evocative phrase, "the profundity of literal meaning"),[40] and he remained true to his understanding of Judaism. Nonetheless, within two generations after his death, almost all of Mendelssohn's direct descendants became Christians.

In the Wake of Mendelssohn: The Versions of Leopold Zunz and David Philippson

In the nineteenth century, successive editions of Mendelssohn's translation, printed with German characters, continued to attract notice in a growing market that became increasingly diverse with the rise of neo-Orthodox and Reform communities among German-speaking Jews.[41] Prominent among those influenced by the Reform movement were Leopold Zunz and Ludwig Philippson, who accommodated into their versions (texts and commentaries) modest amounts of the critical, non-traditional scholarship then being developed by Protestant researchers. Among the neo-Orthodox, the translations of Samson Raphael Hirsch and his son Mendel were especially popular. Publishers also discovered that they could increase sales by packaging some editions as family Bibles.

The lifespan of Leopold Zunz (1794-1886) spanned almost the entire nineteenth century. His translation of the complete Hebrew Bible, for which he engaged several co-translators, initially appeared in 1837. Zunz

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37 Breuer, *The Limits of Enlightenment*, 159.

38 Ibid., 160.

39 Ibid., 161.

40 Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment,* 66.

41 The former were traditional and conservative, while the latter sought to make Judaism "relevant" by jettisoning "out-moded" beliefs and practices and adopting others more in keeping with modern mores.

himself was a pioneer (spoken of by one observer as "the savant") of modern Jewish religious scholarship or *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.[42] As such, he was influenced by, but never identified with, the Reform movement in Judaism. As a result, he was familiar with the critical scholarship that was being formulated at many German-speaking universities and other centers of learning. When judged appropriate, Zunz allowed for the introduction of language and insights that challenged traditional Jewish exegetical traditions. All of this he carefully explicated and defended in the notes that accompanied the German text he produced.

At the same time, he and his coworkers adhered strictly to the Masoretic Text, including the system of accents associated with it. He would meticulously study scribal notations in Hebrew manuscripts to assure strict adherence.

As a result, Zunz's version differed considerably from Mendelssohn's, in that it did not present (or aim to present) an idiomatic, grammatically correct, free-flowing German text. Zunz's translation consistently reminded his readers of the fact that they were looking at a German version of a Hebrew original—or, as one scholar has put it, "it proclaimed...that the Bible, even its German garment, was essentially a Hebraic document."[43]

These two features—the inclusion of non-traditional, non-Jewish biblical scholarship in his commentary and the conscious effort to take the reader to the text through the privileging of the source text—offended a number of Zunz's contemporaries, and he did not escape their criticism or the negative comments of some later observers. However, the marketplace, which represented a broader consensus, was far more favorable. Over the course of more than a century (until at least 1935), seventeen editions of his work appeared.

Starting two years after the publication of Zunz's first edition, that is, in 1839, and continuing for almost a decade and a half (until 1853), Ludwig Philippson (1811-89) published his rendering of the entire Hebrew Bible with commentary. In one sense, Philippson directly challenged Zunz, whose German syntax he (and others) had found awkward. So it was that Philippson's German rendering read much more smoothly and easily than Zunz's.

At another level, Philippson went considerably further than Zunz, for he was far more receptive than his predecessor to the critical scholarship of his day. Thus, for example, each biblical book received an introduction that contained a concise history of interpretation encompassing non-traditional Christian as well as Jewish commentators. These introductions, like the biblical text itself, were constructed with a general audience in mind. This was also the case with the commentary that Philippson devised to accompany the biblical text. And Philippson's Bible, which over time appeared in several editions, was popular.

The German Translation of Samson Raphael Hirsch, the Founder of Neo-Orthodoxy

For many, Philippson's Bible, with its numerous "reader-friendly" features (e.g., a smooth German text, extensive introductions and commentaries aimed at an intelligent lay audience, illustrations), represented a marked advance over anything else available on the market. However, the open inclusion in his commentaries of critical scholarship, although admittedly not to the exclusion or even necessarily to the detriment of traditional Jewish exegesis, was highly unpopular and vocally denounced in many circles. The time was ripe, in terms both of theology and of marketing, for a German-language version of the Bible that was envisioned solely within the contours of traditional Judaism. And, as circumstances would have it, an individual arose who was ideally suited for the task at hand. This individual was Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88).

As one historian would put it, the counterpart to Reform "came forth through the profound and powerful personality, and through [the] strong religious fervour [of Hirsch], the creator and leader of the

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42 For an accessible introduction to this movement and its chief proponents, see the relevant sections of Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of the Jews in Germany, 1743-1933*.

43 Plaut, *German-Jewish Bible Translations*, 11.

neo-orthodoxy....As the progenitor of neo-orthodoxy in western countries, [Hirsch] was aspiring to fuse European culture with unqualified loyalty to rigourously observed traditional Judaism."[44] In this sense, he viewed his task as the means by which traditional Jews could strictly maintain their religiously determined lifestyles, while at the same time selectively participating in the general culture of their day.

As part of this ambitious and all encompassing process, Hirsch translated the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and prayer books. At the heart of his work was his German-language version of the Pentateuch or Torah. As Hirsch himself expressed it, the goal of his translation and the rationale for his Pentateuch were to derive the explanation of the text from the words themselves; to pay close attention to the nuances of the particular expression in each case; to make use of traditional Jewish exegesis, halachic and aggadic; and to use all of this to explore and establish the Jewish outlook and the norms of Jewish life. Hirsch emphasized "the living interdependence and authenticity of the written and oral Law."[45] On this affirmation, which was crucial to the development of rabbinic Judaism, he built his translations and commentary.

Hirsch's "endeavour to explain the Biblical text...out of itself...and on the basis of our own tradition, is in keeping with Hirsch's general principles of Jewish research." [46] In his view, those who espoused Reform Judaism had preconceived notions of what the biblical text ought to say. Not surprisingly, they read these ideas into the text—a procedure that was out of alignment not only with traditional Judaism but also with the procedures of scientific investigation as they were being developed in Hirsch's own time.

And, he continues: "Any theory concerning Judaism...must be checked by and out of the classical sources of Judaism, i.e., the Written Text of the Torah and the Talmud which contains its authentic interpretation. Both together form what is known as the Torah in the wider sense of the word."[47]

Hirsch's "scientific approach" was then contrasted with the supposedly modern outlook of the principal exemplars of Reform Judaism. To many of his supporters, this was Hirsch's great merit. This appeal to "science" in the overturning of a basic tenet of Reform—namely, that Orthodoxy was woefully out of keeping with modern times—was characteristic of Hirsch's project of constructing neo-Orthodoxy as a valid (he would probably have said, the only valid) approach to Judaism in the age of enlightenment.

Hirsch had systematically studied comparative Semitic philology, but did not bring that study to bear in the translation and interpretation of biblical Hebrew. As demonstrated through many examples in his commentary (for a few of them, see below), the approach he took toward Hebrew was based on his understanding of its uniqueness. For Hirsch, "Hebrew was not only the language in which God created the world....It was also the original language...of mankind, and might have remained the universal language uniting all humanity but for the great revolt against God at the time of the 'Generation of the Dispersion' [Gen 11]."[48] As Hirsch himself maintained, "We must read the Torah *in Hebrew*—that is to say, in accordance with the spirit of that language. It describes but little, but through the rich significance of its verbal roots it paints in the word a picture of the thing."[49]

In Hirsch's view, a key component in the correct understanding of biblical Hebrew was a "view of etymology based on the inter-relationship of sounds." This can be illustrated by his comments on the first verb—b-r-'—in the Bible, at Genesis 1:1. This is what he writes as part of his commentary on this root:

> [This and cognate roots] which all have the meaning of striving to get out, or getting out of a state of being constrained or bound, give this root the underlying concept of bringing something out into the open....So this root means bringing something into reality which hitherto had only existed inwardly, in the mind. It is creating something purely out of one's mind and will and out of nothing else. It is...accordingly used only for creation by God. Before the world existed materially it existed only as a thought—to speak in terms of human beings—in the mind of the Creator. The act of creation gave this thought an external concrete existence. The whole word, in toto and in detail, is accordingly nothing but a materialised thought of God.[50]

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44 Belligheimer, "On Jewish translations of the Bible in German," 7.

45 Ibid., 8.

46 Grunfeld, "Introduction," in Hirsch, *Hirsch Commentary on the Torah*, xiii.

47 Ibid.

48 Grunfeld, "Introduction," in Hirsch, *Hirsch Commentary on the Torah*, xiv-xv.

49 "Introduction," in Hirsch, *Hirsch Commentary on the Torah*, xv (as reported by Grunfeld).

50 Hirsch, *Hirsch Commentary on the Torah*, 3.

As to the word '-l-o-h-i-m, which occurs first in Genesis 1:1, Hirsch writes:

> The root '-l-h occurs in the demonstrative pronoun '-l-h 'these.' But the demonstrative plural 'these' always looks at a plurality of things as being in some way joined together to form a unit. And so, whereas '-l-h in general points to the visible plurality of objects in the world, the name of God '-l-v-h could designate the One Whose might and will encompasses all those objects together in unity. The One through Whom all the plurality, by everything being related to Him, becomes one union, one whole, one world. Hence '-l-v-h really means: the One Who is ruler, director, law-giver, judge of the world.... From this underlying conception of the root '-l-h as world-director, law-giver, judge, the same root is also used to designate an oath '-l-h. An oath, according to the Jewish idea, is not merely an appellation to the God-head, but is an actual placing of the whole of the material world of the one who swears under the verdict of the One Who has power to deal with them... and the curse by which the destroying power of the Director of the world will proclaim the falsity of a false oath.[51]

Finally, commenting on the word order by which "God" appears after, rather than before the verb "create," Hirsch writes: "In the way we have believed this name of God to be derived from '-l-h, God can be called '-l-o-h-i-m only after the creation of the world, as it refers to His relation to the world."[52]

One further example, among many that are possible, is taken also from Genesis 1:1; namely, Hirsch's understanding of the concept expressed by sh-ma-yim as developed from the root of the word:

> [sh-ma-yim is] the designation of the whole extra-terrestrial world, as the double 'shem,'[53] as the above and below, "there," the immeasurable double space, above and beneath the earth, or rather—from the root "shum," directing, fixing the place—as the whole complex of extra-terrestrial bodies through whose mutually attracting and repelling forces the earth, like every other point in the universe, keeps to its appointed place. For every point in the universe, the whole of the rest of space with all its bodies, would be sh-ma-yim. In any case the word sh-ma-yim already tells us that we have not to expect here any superterrestrial cosmogonic revelations. The extra-terrestrial is only mentioned and considered in its relation to the earth.[54]

The close relationship between text and commentary, which is also evident in connection with many other Jewish Bibles, is crucial to a proper evaluation of Hirsch's efforts. As W. Gunther Plaut observed, for Hirsch:

> the translation was only the necessary backdrop to the commentary, not the other way around. To be sure, one started with the text, but what Tradition made of it was the important matter that needed to be communicated to the Jewish reader. And his exhaustive and brilliant commentary was thoroughly traditional. Talmud, Midrash and the great commentaries of the past were his constant reference. His translations of Torah and Psalms were nothing more than a medium by which the eternal truth and beauty of the original could be made known."[55]

And that medium, no matter how we evaluate it, owed its very existence to Hirsch's certainty about the unity and unique sanctity of the written and oral law.

In no place throughout his robust commentary does Hirsch engage in direct combat with biblical criticism. Nonetheless, his familiarity with such methods cannot seriously be doubted when, for example, he argues in his commentary at Genesis 2:4 against any efforts to discern two separate and contrasting accounts of creation in the first chapters of Genesis.

Hirsch's translation of the Torah, printed in Frankfort, first appeared in 1867, with a third edition being issued in 1899. His rendering of the Psalms was published in 1882; a German-language version of the Minor Prophets, produced by his son Mendel, came out in 1900.

Alone among those Jews who rendered the Bible into German, Hirsch and his ideas have benefited from the fact that his version of—and commentary on—the Bible have been translated into English, more than once. This has opened up his work to a far larger audience of scholars and members of the general public than would otherwise have been possible. In English, the Hirsch Torah continues to exert significant influence within Orthodox circles worldwide.

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51 Ibid., 3-4.

52 Ibid., 4.

53 The word "sh-ma-yim" is in the dual, hence Hirsch's use of the expression "double 'shem.'"

54 Hirsch, *Hirsch Commentary on the Torah*, 5.

55 Plaut, *German-Jewish Bible Translations*, 13.

Samuel Cahen and Nineteenth Century French Translation of the Bible

Earlier in the nineteenth century, Samuel Cahen produced an influential translation in French. Once again, due emphasis should be placed on the commentary, in addition to the text itself.

Cahen was born in northeast France, in the city of Metz, in 1796; he died in Paris in 1862. The city offered a congenial environment for Cahen, who was able to follow a traditional Jewish education in rabbinical studies and to become fully acquainted with the pedagogical methods and materials associated with modern languages and literatures. After his graduation and a brief stint as a tutor in Germany, he moved in 1822 to Paris, which was to be the center of his intellectual and institutional efforts for the rest of his life.[56]

During this period Cahen was much involved in what was to be the major achievement of his life: the translation of the Bible into French, with the Hebrew on facing pages, accompanied by critical notes and extended essays by himself and others. When published in 1851, the edition, *La Bible, traduction nouvelle,* consisted of eighteen volumes and constituted a major advance for French-speakers, both Jewish and non-Jewish.[57] Even before the completion of this magnum opus, Cahen was appointed a chevalier of the Legion of Honor in 1849.

Cahen's translation of the Hebrew Bible remained the unrivalled standard version until the very end of the nineteenth century. Even today it is readily available in updated paperback editions.[58] Nonetheless, his work has been subject to some unfavorable judgments, owing mostly to concerns about his uncritical handling of material in the notes and essays.[59]

What is especially relevant for the present study is that criticism of Cahen's work, whether or not it is fully or only partially justified, centered not on the text of the translation, but on the commentary found in notes and introductory material. In my view, such comments should not detract from the overall value of Cahen's version within the context of both Jewish Bible translations and of achievements by members of France's Jewish community.[60]

Translation into Italian: Samuel David Luzzatto

The most famous Italian-language Bibles for Jews come from the nineteenth century; they are the work of Samuel David Luzzatto, also known as Shadal.[61] Born into a family distinguished by its erudition, Luzzatto excelled as a scholar, a poet, and a leading member of the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement, which sought to analyze all aspects of Jewish literature and culture through the use of critical, scientific methods in keeping with those developed for the study of other scholarly fields.[62]

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56 Broydé, "Cahen, Samuel."

57 Delmaire ("Les traductions de la Bible au XIX⁰ siècle et la Bible du rabbinat," 90) provides a succinct account and evaluation of this version.

58 Among these is *La Bible: Torah, Nevihim, Ketouvim,* tr. Samuel Cahen (1994).

59 Cahen and his collaborators made use of a dazzlingly wide array of sources that were oftimes at odds with each other in terms of method and substance. Not surprisingly, adherents of a particular approach on occasion felt slighted by its characterization in Cahen's edition.

60 My view is consistent with Delmaire's ("Les traductions de la Bible au XIX⁰ siècle et la Bible du rabbinat," 91): "Et il faut admettre que Samuel Cahen a joué un rôle de passer car il a contribué à faire connaître les travaux des exégètes allemands. Sa traduction est un travail d'érudition accompagné de longues introductions, dues à la plume d'éminents collaborateurs, qui sont de véritables études." Among these scholars was Salomon Munk; he was responsible for "savants introductions pour les premiers tomes de la traduction de la Bible par Samuel Cahen."

61 This is an acronym formed from the first letters of his name in Hebrew. Similar acronyms identify other major figures in Jewish scholarship.

62 In this spirit, Margolis ("Bible Translation," 89-90) writes appreciatively: Luzzatto "unquestionably belongs [in] the first rank among modern Jewish students of the Bible. It may be said of him that he raised biblical studies among the Jews to the dignity of a specialty, requiring a man's whole time and energy and pursued as a profession."

Luzzatto was born in August 1800 in the city of Trieste; he died in 1865 at Padua. As is the case with several other Jewish translators whose biographical details are known, Luzzatto began study at a very early age and was something of a prodigy. His education was guided by leaders in both traditional Jewish and secular learning. For him the latter included the study of classical and modern languages and of science. His father, a well-known Talmudist, made his living as a furniture maker.[63]

At the age of eleven, Luzzatto began to write a Hebrew grammar in the Italian language; during that same year, he translated into Hebrew the life of Aesop and wrote exegetical notes on the Pentateuch. Within the next three years, he embarked on a serious study of Aramaic, determined that the vowels and accents of the Masoretic Text were post-Talmudic, and dated the *Zohar* (the key text of the Jewish mystical tradition) to a fairly late date due to its handling of these vowels and accents. No small achievements for a young man who had not yet turned fourteen![64]

In the years that followed, even when encumbered by responsibilities at home and in the business world, he continued to produce scholarly works as well as poems in excellent Hebrew. Between 1816 and 1817, he emerged as a biblical critic by suggesting textual changes at Ecclesiastes 10:1 and Habakkuk 2:16.[65]

Finally, in 1829, he was appointed a professor at the rabbinical college in Padua. The newly established Collegio Rabbinico in Padua was the first modern rabbinical seminary in the world.[66]

For Luzzatto, the truth was to be located in the teachings of biblical and Talmudic Judaism. However, such teachings were not immune to critical study; rather, application of scientific methods only enhanced their value by allowing their innate truth to come to the fore. So, for example, knowledge of ancient languages, including Syriac, Samaritan, and Aramaic, was necessary for the full explication of biblical and other early Jewish texts.

His intense analysis of portions of the Hebrew Bible could lead to what might be termed "radical" conclusions, as is the case with his argument—presented in commentaries and elaborated upon in later works—that the author of Ecclesiastes was not King Solomon but rather a later author whose name was Kohelet. Or Luzzatto could come down on the side of tradition, as when he argued in favor of the unity of the book of Isaiah against what was fast becoming the scholarly orthodoxy of first and second Isaiah. In this case, he felt strongly that denying authorship of the entire book to the seventh century prophet was tantamount to denying to Isaiah the full scope of divinely inspired prophecy.[67]

The mixed results of Luzzatto's exegesis of the Hebrew Bible can also be discerned from his work on the Pentateuch. Although he firmly believed that Moses was the author of the Torah, he was not a fundamentalist. So, for example, he did not take the first chapters of Genesis literally, but at the same time insisted that they not be treated as (mere) allegory. Rather, he saw them as model lessons from which readers were to derive essential moral and ethical values.[68] As for issues related to dating, Luzzatto also ascribed an early date to the book of Job and to the Psalter, although he did not insist that all of the psalms were written by David himself.[69] His views on all of these matters can be drawn from the remarks he penned for his commentaries.

For Luzzatto, it was essential to maintain a firm belief in revelation and to treat the text of the Torah as sacred. Nonetheless, on occasion he did not follow the traditional wording as reflected in the Masoretic notes and the Talmud. In these instances, he was often guided by the Targums, with which he was acquainted from an early age.

All of this is in keeping with what Israel Abrahams speaks of as two of "the ten principles by which [Luzzatto] was guided [as] clearly adumbrated in the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Isaiah": "9. In rabbinic interpretations...the vowels and the accents do not always indicate the actual meaning ascribed by the ancients to the verses in question. They often deliberately deviate, for their own reasons,

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63 Rudavsky, "Samuel David Luzzato and Neo-Orthodoxy," 25.
64 Greenberg, "Luzzatto, Samuel David (Shadal)."
65 Abrahams, "Samuel David Luzzatto as Exegete," 84.
66 Seligsohn, "Samuel David (ShaDaL) Luzzatto," 225; Rudavsky, "Samuel David Luzzatto and Neo-Orthodoxy," 25.
67 Abrahams, "Samuel David Luzzatto as Exegete," 97-98.
68 Tobias, "Luzzatto, Samuel David," 286.
69 Abrahams, "Samuel David Luzzatto as Exegete," 98.

from the true sense of the passages." And "10. Although Holy Writ was treated at all times with the utmost veneration, it was inevitable that some variant readings, of which only one can be correct, should have crept in here and there."[70]

His Italian translations of the Bible were one of the most noteworthy ways in which Luzzatto exhibited and passed on this interest: in 1853, there appeared his Italian translation of Job; from 1855-1867, he produced an Italian translation of the book of Isaiah along with a Hebrew commentary; during a portion of that same time frame, from 1858-1860, he published his Italian translation of the Pentateuch and the Haftarot. These were followed, after his death, by commentaries on the Pentateuch in 1871 and on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Proverbs, and Job in 1876.[71] (Many other works by Luzzatto were also first published or appeared in revised form after his death, thanks to the efforts of his family and disciples.) On the whole, these translations and commentaries reflect Luzzatto's views as enumerated above.

A sampling of his commentary reveals the lively and expansive way in which he expressed his exegetical insights. Thus, for example, at Genesis 1:27 he argues that *tzelem* does not signify the form of the body, but rather the likeness of something. Thus the expression *tzelem Elohim* means that humans resemble God because they possess all of his attributes, while other animals have only a single godly quality (e.g., the hard work of the ant or the chastity of the dove).[72] At Exodus 15:2 Luzzatto discourses at some length on the uses and possible origins of parallelism in biblical poetry. He also explains how the word *mashal* came to be associated with biblical poetry in general, while terms drawn from the root *shir* were restricted to poems that were sung.[73]

In common with other scholars of his day, Luzzatto expended considerable energy on illuminating nuanced differences in terms that were largely synonymous. Thus, both *tur* and *raggel* are verbs meaning "to spy"; however, the latter is consistently used in a pejorative sense, while the former has a positive connotation. The verb *yareh* does indeed mean "to fear." However, its precise shade of meaning changes in accordance with the preposition or sign of the accusative that follows it.[74]

As I noted above, while still in his teens, Luzzatto proposed emendations in the biblical text at Habakkuk 2:16 and Ecclesiastes 10:1. Later, he saw the need for textual emendation in other places outside of the Torah; for example, at Isaiah 10:25, 11:15, and 30:6. He did not believe that such errors entered inadvertently into the Torah, which was transmitted more diligently than other portions of the Hebrew Bible. Given his conservative (although by no means fundamentalist) understanding of the biblical text, Luzzatto did not propose his emendations without due consideration. Rather, he insisted that the received text should be altered only when absolutely essential to the proper understanding of the text and only after a full consideration of cognate languages and all other possible alternatives.[75]

It would not be inappropriate to characterize Luzzatto's approach to the Bible as exemplifying a middle way that sought to synthesize the old (traditional) and the new (scientific). He himself hoped that in future times people would say: "Shadal made criticism compatible with belief; it alone satisfied the 'needs of the generation.'"[76]

The Twenty-First Century

We now return to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, where we began. Let us first observe that the full title of Robert Alter's translation under review by John Updike was *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*. This same wording—"A Translation with Commentary"—constituted the

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[70] Ibid., 90-92.
[71] An accessible list of Luzzatto's publications, including his biblical translations and commentaries in Italian, appears in Seligsohn, "Samuel David (ShaDaL) Luzzatto," 225-26.
[72] Abrahams, "Samuel David Luzzatto as Exegete," 94-95.
[73] Ibid., 94.
[74] Ibid., 95.
[75] Ibid., 96-97.
[76] Ibid.

sub-title of all of Alter's biblical translations preceding and following 2004: *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary* (1999), *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (2007), *The Wisdom Books: A Translation with Commentary* (2010), *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets; Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings: A Translation with Commentary* (2013), *Strong As Death Is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel: A Translation with Commentary* (2106).

Minimally, we can observe that Alter's practice—prominently mentioned in the full title of all of his versions—is in keeping with long-standing Jewish tradition concerning the close link between translated text and commentary and that therefore Updike should not have registered surprise (or, I would add, discomfort) with Alter's upfront disclosure of what he was going to be doing. In my view, Updike was sufficiently astute as an observer of literature to know full well the primary source—that is, Judaism—from which Alter was drawing both for the method and the material of his commentaries.

Nor is Alter unique among contemporary Jewish translators in the explicit inclusion of the term "commentary" in the titles of his editions. He is joined by Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: A New Translation with Introductions, Commentary, and Notes*; and Richard Elliott Friedman *Commentary on the Torah: With a New English Translation,* among others.

Jewish versions need not have the word "commentary" in their title for this to be among their most prominent features. This was brought home to me by a remark made by an Orthodox rabbi in Omaha. We were discussing Aryeh Kaplan. *The Living Torah: The Five Books of Moses and the Haftarot*. I mentioned that I found his translation odd in several respects, perhaps owing to the mystic view Rabbi Kaplan espoused in all of his work. For the young Orthodox rabbi with whom I was talking, the text of Kaplan's translation was little more than an afterthought. In his evaluation, the breadth and depth of Kaplan's commentary were all that really mattered.

Conclusion

For the most part,[77] Jewish versions of the Bible were not intended to replace the original, but rather to take a place alongside it or to serve as a guide to its proper understanding. This is often observable by the placement of the foreign-language version and the Hebrew text on facing pages. Even when this is not the case, the Jewish version reflects, through its wording and annotation, interpretations that developed within the exegetical and liturgical traditions of the Jewish community. Moreover, the format and layout of a Jewish version are shaped by practices initially associated with the practices of scribes who transmitted the Hebrew text.

At the same time, Jewish communities, from as early as the third century BCE in Alexandria, Egypt, recognized that a number of their co-religionists lacked sufficient facility in Hebrew to follow the reading of the Torah in that language. Only grudgingly did community leaders come to recognize that this was the case even with adult males—and not only with females and children, to whom many early versions were explicitly addressed.

Even when the practical necessity of translation was acknowledged, its possible benefits could be disparaged. This was one line of Talmudic thinking about the Septuagint in particular, all translation in general.[78] No translator of the Bible was unaware of such criticisms, which could be answered, implicitly or explicitly, in a number of ways.

Throughout this article, I have suggested that the writing of commentary was one of the major and most far-reaching means through which Jewish Bible translators sought to bridge the gap between original text and translated version. We close this article by looking at this more closely in connection with three passages or images.

We turn first to a statement in *Massekhet Sepher Torah*, I, 8-9: "Seventy elders wrote the Torah for Ptolemy in Greek writing and that day was as hard for Israel as the day when they made the Calf, for the

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77 Cf. Saadiah's *Tafsir*.
78 On this, see Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint*.

Torah could not be properly translated." See also *Massekhet Sopherim*, I, 7-8: "A story about five elders who wrote [that is, translated] the Torah in Greek for king Ptolemy; and that day was as hard for Israel as the day when the Calf was made, for the Torah could not be properly translated." Although the image of the Golden Calf is certainly evocative, the criticism of the Septuagint (intended to stand also for all translations?) is rather banal. No matter how we translate the word rendered here by "properly," it does not take us beyond the realm of the general. Nonetheless, later translators might well have argued, to their own satisfaction if not to others', that one of the major functions of the commentary was to make up for these (admittedly unspecified) deficiencies in the translation.

In another early passage, the Septuagint translators were reproached for entrapping the biblical text in a cage like a bird. In its Hebrew original, so we are to understand, Sacred Writ yearns to be free, to be variously interpreted, to interact in different ways with different readers in different contexts. From this perspective, translations, rather than being creative means to such ends, tended to be ends onto themselves—dead ends. When alternative exegetical viewpoints are given prominence in the commentary, the text is once again freed, allowed to soar, no longer entangled in a net of deadening dogmatism. In this respect, the commentary is a distinctly, though not exclusively, Jewish way of opening up biblical language to readers who are not able to interact with it in the original.

The final passage comes from a much later time, the early twentieth century; it is attributed to the Hebrew poet, Hayim Nahman Bialik: "Whoever knows Judaism through translation is like a person who kisses his mother through a handkerchief." While not limited to Bible translation, Bialik's striking imagery does seem appropriate, perhaps uniquely so, for a Jew striving to understand Sacred Writ. What Bialik picks up on is a sense of intimacy, tactile and, yes, sensual, that was available to those who could interact directly, at firsthand with the Hebrew and Aramaic of the original. Is such intimacy impossible for the non-Hebrew reader? Bialik seems to be making this assertion. But the Jewish Bible translators we've looked at in this article offer what I would term a counter-proposal. Indeed, the intimacy of interaction at the level of the original languages cannot be reproduced, but it can be replaced through assiduous study of the best exegesis and exegetes that Judaism has to offer. More cerebral, less sensuous? No doubt.

But no less authentic.

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