AN ARABIC TAFSİR OF THE SONG OF DEBORAH

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Among the translations of the Bible made by Rab Saadiah Gaon, which were published mainly by orientalists towards the end of the 19th century, there has not been found to date any relic of his translations of the Former Prophets. It is indeed still problematical whether he translated the Former Prophets at all. Only a complete survey of Geniza fragments in the libraries of the world might bring a solution nearer.

An interesting contribution to the subject was published by Dr. Ezra Zion Melamed1, who edited an Arabic tafsîr of the Song of Deborah from a manuscript of Haphtaroth in the British Museum.2 The author notes the rarity of collections of Haphtaroth which have Hebrew, Targum, and Arabic translation.

While examining photographs of MSS generally and looking for MSS in Israel, the present author found another three similar collections:

(a) A MS of Haphtaroth from the Geniza in the University of Strasbourg,3 in which the Aramaic translation is given after every verse, while in the Haphtaroth from the Book of Isaiah there is added also Saadiah’s tafsîr. The Haphtaroth to רכזת — viz., the Song of Deborah and the two preceding verses — appears as a separate section written according to all the traditional rules of the scribes. On the remainder of the page TJ and the Arabic tafsîr are given alternately, verse by verse, as in the British Museum MS.

(b) A Yemenite MS of Haphtaroth belonging to the family of Rabbi Yehiah Alshekh of Jerusalem, who kindly gave me access to it. In this MS also4 Saadiah’s tafsîr to the Haphtaroth in the Book of Isaiah is given (except for the Haphtaroth of שיר שמש, which like all the other Haphtaroth only gives MT and TJ). The Haphtaroth of רכזת is not given with tafsîr.

(c) Fragments from the Geniza Collection of Taylor and Schechter in Cam-

2. MS Heb. Or. 11116, parchment, 13th cent.
3. Strasbourg University Library MS 4004, fol. 13-15. I take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the Hebrew Manuscripts Institute of the Israel Ministry of Education and Culture and its director, Dr. N. Allony, for enabling me to consult this and the following MSS in microfilms in their collection, and also to the various libraries where the original MSS are kept for permission to publish material from them.
4. I hope to provide a more detailed description of this important MS in the critical edition of Saadiah’s Arabic translation of the Book of Isaiah which I am preparing for the Hebrew University Bible Project.
bridge, in which there are fragments of the *Haphtaroth* to הָרְךְּ הַנְּהָר, viz., from the books of Kings, Malachi and Jeremiah.

An Arabic *tafsir* of בֵּנְשִׁים (Judges iv, 23–v, 31) is found therefore in two MSS of *Haphtaroth*, viz., in the British Museum and in Strasbourg. It seems to me that both are of Yemenite provenience.

The same *tafsir*, also in Hebrew letters, appears again in two Yemenite MSS of the Former Prophets in the British Museum. The two MSS were written by the same scribe at the end of the 16th century. Here also the MT of the Song of Deborah is separated from the alternating verses of TJ and the *tafsir*. Judges iv, 23–24, which belongs also to this *Haphtarah*, is translated into Arabic as well (as in the two MSS of the *Haphtaroth*). Margoliouth assumed that this was probably Saadia’s translation. On the one hand Dr. E.Z. Melamed brings evidence to support this view, but on the other hand he leaves room for a further examination of the material in order to fix its author’s identity more definitely.

There are two reasons for reprinting the *tafsir* in this article:

(a) We have three additional MSS, and thus are able to restore the words damaged and torn in the British Museum MS which Dr. Melamed used.
(b) We have now the entire *Haphtarah*, including the two verses preceding the Song of Deborah.

We still lack reliable criteria for fixing the identity of the authors of Arabic *tafasir* to the Bible. First of all we have no Hebrew-Arabic or Arabic-Hebrew vocabularies for the usage peculiar to each of the translators. Dr. Melamed compared a large number of words from the *tafsir* of the Song of Deborah (hereafter referred to as D) with Saadia’s known translations, and the similarities are indeed great.

Furthermore there is no comprehensive study of Saadia’s methods of translation (and exegesis). I think that Dr. Melamed has proved that similar methods of translation (and exegesis) are used in D and in S.’s *tafsir*. Dr. Melamed’s only point in favour of attributing the translation to another author is that in D, v 8 הָאָלָלֹאָה הָאֲלָלֹאָה מַדְאָה is rendered as אָלָלֹאָה הָאֲלָלֹאָה מַדְאָה, while S. always writes מַדְאָה מַדְאָה מַדְאָה for “gods” when referring to the deities of heathen. This evidence is however not certain. In Dt. iv, 28, for “And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men’s hands”, he has, according to Dérenbourg’s edition

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5. T.—S. Box B 19.
6. I have meanwhile come across additional fragments of Arabic translations from these books, and hope to reproduce these on a future occasion with a discussion as to the likelihood of their being from the pen of Saadia.
7. MSS Heb. Or. 2371 and 1474.
of 1893 and MS B.M. Or. 25859... תְּפִלָּתֵי הַיָּמִים אֵלֶּה הַמִּצְוָה מֵאָז וְדוֹאָה אַלֵימוֹת, though other MSS, such as Or. 4839, read instead מַצְלָה. Moreover, there have been theological reasons for choosing here מַצְלָה. The adjective (literally “created”) in itself negates the divine character of these “gods”, and he was there logically obliged to use for the negated term a word meaning the conception it negates.

We shall cite twelve further deviations of D from Saadia’s usage below, arranged in the alphabetical order of the Hebrew roots.

These suggest two possibilities as to the translator’s identity:

(a) That it was one of S.’s disciples, during his master’s life or after, who took S.’s translations as his model, or even used a Saadianic dictionary, but of course deviated in minor matters.10

(b) That Saadia himself made this translation before the main period of his literary activity and before his usage became fixed.

The third possibility, that a translation of S. was here changed, intentionally or otherwise, by scribes seems to me unlikely.

Notes on the Critical Apparatus

1. The text is printed according to T = Haphtaroth MS B.M. Heb. Or. 11116.
2. Other MSS:
   A = Former Prophets, MS B.M. Heb. Or. 1471, Margoliouth no. 130.
   B = Former Prophets, MS B.M. Heb. Or. 2371, Margoliouth no. 131.
   R = Haphtaroth, MS Strasbourg Université 4004.
3. Matter missing in T and supplied from elsewhere is enclosed in square brackets. Where such matter is found in all other MSS, no special indication is given. Cases in which diacritic points are omitted in T are mentioned only when the diacritic points are supplied from other MSS.
4. The word al before “Israel” or the names of tribes is in the MSS written as part of the next word, but here printed separately.

9. Also Strasbourg Univ. Libr. MS 3992 and National Library of Madrid MS 5475 have נַחַב, while Strasbourg Univ. Libr. MS 3999 has נַחֲבֶּה; B.M. Or. 2704 נַחֲבֶּה; and an Egyptian MS (apparently of the 15th cent.) in possession of Mr. M. Benayahu has נַחֲבֶּה. The text of the last-named MS was kindly transcribed for me by the owner, whom I herewith thank.

10. This disciple may well have been Isaac al-Kanzl, who is mentioned as author of a translation of the Former Prophets in a Geniza fragment published by Mann (Jews in Egypt, II, 310).
IV. 23. And God at that time put

to flight Jabin the king of
Canaan before the children of
Israel.

24. And the hand of the children
of Israel went on, whenever
occasion presented itself, prevailing
against Jabin the king of Canaan,
until they put him to flight.

V.1. And Deborah and Barak the
son of Abinoam praised at
that time, saying:

2. When breaches were uncovered
in the house of Israel and the
people willingly offered themselves,
bless ye the Lord.

3. Hear, O assemblies of kings
and listen, O all the viziers: I
(fem.) am praising the Lord and
glorifying the Lord, God of Israel.

4. O Lord, at the time of thine
appearance from Seir and thy
revelation from Edom, the earth
trembled and the heavens dripped
and the clouds poured water.

5. And the mountains dripped
from before the Lord, and par-
ticularly Sinai from before the Lord,
God of Israel.

6. In the days of Shamgar the son
of Anath, in the days of Jael the
paths ceased and the travellers of
roads began to walk unsteady paths.
7. And the open suburbs in the house of Israel ceased (to exist) and became inaccessible, until that I, Deborah, arose and took upon me the task of a teacher in the house of Israel.

8. When they were choosing new-fangled gods, at that time people fought them in their gates; moreover, there was no shield and no spear. But when they repented, there being with him forty thousand chiefs of armies, they (those people) could not overcome the house of Israel.

9. My heart rejoices for the lawgivers of the house of Israel, those distinguished from among the people, bless ye the Lord.

10. O assemblies of riders on white she-asses, who are seated to await the caravans and passers-by on the road, announce this news.

11. From the voice of those who interpose themselves between the drinking places, there shall they tell the general justice of the Lord and his particular justice concerning (or: in) the suburbs. At that time the people of the Lord went down to their gates.

13. At that time shall those expelled from among the nobles of the people obtain dominion, for the Lord gave me dominion over the tyrants.

14. Of Ephraim are they who uprooted Amalek, and others, of Benjamin, did likewise with the nations, and of the house of Machir are those who became lawgivers, and out of Zebulun they that draw the pen of scribes.

15. And the chiefs out of Issachar are with Deborah, and the rest of the house of Issachar, the same as Barak, are being sent in the valley with him, and the divisions of Reuben are too numerous for one's mind to take count of them.

16. Ye will not abide between the elevated seats to hear the whistling of the flocks, for your divisions have a great deal of abstinence (or: purity) of the heart.

17. As to the house of Gilead, they abide beyond Jordan. And Dan will not stay in ships. Asher usually abides on the seashore, and he stays at his ease.

18. And of Zebulun are those that freely offer their souls unto death, and Naphtali on the highest part of the land.

19. When the kings came, they fought against us. Then we
fought them, the kings of Canaan, in Taanach by the water of al-Jayin without their taking anything out of greed for wealth.
20. From heaven the stars fought them, from their courses they fought Sisera.
21. And behold, the brook of Kishon swept them away, the ancient brook, the brook of Kishon, in which I used to walk when I had my strength.
22. Then the hoofs of their horses struck (the ground) because of the hurry of their great ones who were hurrying.
23. The messenger of the Lord hath said: Curse ye Meroz, and curse the inhabitants thereof with a grievous curse again and again (?), for they have not come to the help of the people of the Lord, to the help of His nation against the tyrants.
24. In contrast, Blessed above women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Better than women possessing tents, Blessed shall she be.
25. When he asked her for water, she gave him milk to drink, and in a mighty dish (?) she brought him butter.
26. Then she extended her hand to the tent-peg and her right hand to the workmen’s hammer.
And she struck Sisera, brained his head and split his brain, and pierced his cheek.

27. Under her foot he went on his knees, he fell and fell asleep in that fall on his knees, when he went on his knees under her foot in the place where he was stretched out, there he fell down despoiled.

28. From the inside of the bow window the mother of Sisera looked out and cried, from the lattice window, saying: what is the matter with the chariot of my son that it is so late, and what ails the feet of his chariot (horses) that they are so late?

29. The wisest of her noble ladies answers her, and she also gives herself an answer:

30. Perchance they have found booty and they divide it there, a slave-girl or two to every man’s head, and Sisera has obtained booty of colours, booty of brocade and variegated cloth, or dye sufficient for two pieces of cloth for every neck of the booty.

31. So will perish the rest of them that hate Thee, O Lord and those that love thee will rejoice as the rising of the sun in his might. And after that the land had rest for forty years.

27. שמדמה שהאחתה דומגתה באמצעות כ. 28. עלותים AB. 29. וסמאשה A. 30. טלשלם דק וגר סכלה 초 מיספמלת A, ורומחון על חכמה רכז אחר טל סכלה לסרוסה שלב ירבדה וריקמה וצבריו דח רך ונגב מאלסלה. 31. הנחיה ויבר מאמיר באנף כי רב ומקהיל כי גרנום אלוiszımı בבר רגונה את 다르יא בבר דלך ארבש. הנחיה
Differences from the Usage of Saadiyah

1. v. 27. D: הבארת (Gen. xxvii, 17) or מֹשֶׁה (Job xxxix 30).

2. v. 28. D: לֹא יִזְכָּר (Pr. vii, 6) or a more unusual translation: מִדֶּרֶךְ (Is. xxxii, 14 and see there Dérenbourg's note).

3. v. 12. D: קִבֵּל אֲלָחָם (Dt. xxxii, 44).

4. v. 4. D: הָשִּׁיל (as Num. xxvii, 7; Dt. xxxiii, 2; Is. lxiv, 2; Ps. cxlvii, 18). Moreover, in the parallel of our verse in D, Ps. lxviii, 9, has translated by S. the verb as כְּנֶחֶד (Job xxix, 22) or כְּנֶה (Pr. v, 3).

The verb כְּנֶחֶד appears here twice, in vss. 4 and 5. One of S.'s characteristics is his inclination to avoid repetition of the same word or expression. For example, Is. lxviii, 19; lxiv, 2 are translated by him the first time בָּשָׂר, and the second time בֹּשֵׂם אֶלֶפֶת. Hence even if S. would have translated כְּנֶחֶד in v. 4 as כְּנֶה, he would have chosen probably כְּנֶה (melt) in v. 5 as a translation for בֹּשֵׂם.

5. v. 23. D: מְנַגֵּא (and מְנַגֵּא) always as מְנַגֵּא (זִיוּרִיס לְעָוֹר). There is also מְנַגֵּא (Is. xxx, 1).

6. v. 27. D: מְנַגֵּא (as in Jb. xx, 22, iii, 20) or מְנַגֵּא (Ps. lxxiii, 16) or מְנַגֵּא (Is. liii, 11); מְנַגֵּא (Pr. xvi, 26). Where מְנַגֵּא appears in the Bible in another meaning, there is no parallel in S.'s extant tafsīr.

7. v. 15. D: מְנַגֵּא (as in the translation of geographical names the components of which are מְנַגֵּא as nomen regens and any proper name as nomen rectum, S. used as a rule to leave the nomen regens as it was in the original text, i.e., מְנַגֵּא, and the name either remained unchanged (מְנַגֵּא מְנַגֵּא) or was translated (מְנַגֵּא - מְנַגֵּא מְנַגֵּא - מְנַגֵּא מְנַגֵּא). מְנַגֵּא (Nu. xiv, 17); מְנַגֵּא (Ps. lxxxiv, 7) or in the plural form: מְנַגֵּא מְנַגֵּא (Is. lxv, 10, Job xxxix, 21), like the translation of מְנַגֵּא (Jb. xxxix, 10). As in MT מְנַגֵּא is not a nomen regens, our passage speaks against S.'s authorship.

8. v. 22. D: חָסָם חָסָם. Although חָסָם is the Arabic name of the horse's heels, it should be mentioned that it was translated always as חָסָם.
S.'s *tafāsir*; in the only other place where עַטָּקִית וּסְעָפָר are mentioned (Gen. xlvi, 17) S. has עַטָּקִית וּסְעָפָר.

9. v. 6 מֵשַׁלֵּקה עֲרֵכָה. It is difficult to state the relation of this translation to S., as there is only one more example in his known translations: מֵשַׁלֵּקה עֲרֵכָה (Ps. cxxv, 5). True, the two Arabic roots עֲרֵכָה and עֲרֵכָה (in the fifth form) fit more or less, and what is more important, they sound like the Hebrew, as was S.'s habit in many of his translations; but it looks strange when we compare it with מֵשַׁלֵּקה-Unos (Is. xxvii, 1). The Arabic root עֲרֵכָה was found to fit our verse in D by David ben Abraham al-Fasi, who uses it in the above-mentioned verses of Is. and Ps.

10. v. 8 רֵאוֹמָה D: רוֹמָא. Such a vague translation we do not find in S.'s *tafāsir*. There is a similar expression for God's appearance (Gn. xxii, 14) or רָאָה (Ex. xiii, 7).

11. v. 28 מְאָסָכְב הָוְרָבָן D: מְאָסָכְב הָוְרָבָן. The regular renderings are מְאָסָכְב הָוְרָבָן (Ex. xiv, 6, 23) and מְאָסָכְב הָוְרָבָן (Gn. L, 9).

12. v. 4 רְשֹׁב D: רְשֹׁב. Whilst in all other S.'s translations הוֹלֵלִית, we find the root והוֹלֵלִית, although our sounds like the Hebrew, it differs from the other passages.