A KARAITE LETTER-FOR-LETTER TRANSLITERATION
OF BIBLICAL HEBREW – MS FIRKOVITSH II, ARAB.-EVR. 355

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The manuscript Arab.-evr. 355 in the Second Firkovitsh Collection in the National
Library of Russia in St. Petersburg (the former Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library
in Leningrad) consists of one double folio of very brownish paper which on four
pages includes an Arabic transliteration of the passages 1 Chr 28:15–29:12 (folio 1)
and 2 Chr 4:8–5:7 (folio 2).¹ Obviously the manuscript is part of a larger booklet
which originally contained numerous similar double leaves inside and outside this
single folio which has been preserved. The pages measure 17 x 13.5 cm and the text
surface 12.5 x 10 cm. Folio 1 contains 16 lines and the second one 17 lines written
in black ink in round cursive nashī. Arabic script is rubbed away in several places and
in folio 2 a number of folds and tears obliterate the text. In this article the erased
characters have been restored between square brackets; an exception consists of
two words, the transliteration of which remains problematic.²

The Arabic transliteration is written without diacritical signs. The only exception
is a bow on top of ʾšin in ṣḥrṣym (= ʾḥsrým, 1 Chr 28:21); it distinguishes the Arabic
counterpart of Hebrew 𐤀 as being ʾšin instead of ʾšin. Of the Hebrew pointing
marks, ʾšere occurs twice in the manuscript: ʾṣrṭḥ ʾḥsŕ (2 Chr 4:17) and ʾwbye’ =

¹I copied the manuscript during my stay in the Library in February 1993, and in September
1993 I collated the computer print-out with the manuscript. In September I also obtained the
black-and-white photos from the Manuscript Department of the Library. In this connection I
wish to express my gratitude to the staff of the Department for their kind assistance as well
as for the opportunity to prepare a publication of this manuscript.

²According to the card catalogue of the Library, compiled by Victor Lebedev, the manuscript
dates back to the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century.

²ךלוא (1 Chr 29:5) and מֵשָׁמָא (2 Chr 4:8), in which the order of the counterparts of ʾalef
and waw is not certain (cf. מֵשָׁמָא 1 Chr 29:2).
(2 Chr 5:1). A colon indicates the end of a verse. In two words dots on the top of a letter may stand for dageš: ḫyyr = תְּכַהָּר (2 Chr 4:14)² and ḫnǚŷjw = תְּכַהָּר (2 Chr 4:22). The magqef line has no counterpart in the transliteration. The tetragrammaton is represented by the symbol י, which in numerous cases is preceded by a dot. The Masoretic pisqa ‘ot potuhot paragraphs are indicated by a short blank in the transliteration, while the two cases of setumah have no counterpart in the transliteration; both of them occur in the middle of a verse (2 Chr 4:11 and 5:1).

In the transliteration of begadkefat consonants, beth and bheth are indicated by Arabic bā‘, gimel by Arabic ḥā‘ (i.e. ḥīm; diacritical dots are lacking) and ghimel by ‘ayn (i.e. ḡayn), dalet by dāl and dhalet by dāl, kaf by kāf and kham by ḥā‘ (i.e. ḥā‘), both pe and phe by fā‘, and taw and thaw by Arabic lā‘.

In contrast to the usual practice of Karaite transcriptions of biblical texts,⁴ matres lectionis letters are not used to reflect the length of vowels in this transliteration; thus e.g. לְנֵי appears as ntn⁵ (2 Chr 4:10, pro *tn‘n) and וְנֵשֵׁש as wh‘šr (1 Chr 29:12, pro *wh‘vr). On the contrary, each mater lectionis of the Hebrew text is transliterated by its Arabic counterpart; in this respect there is no difference between plene spellings and silent (quiescens) matres lectionis: וְהָרָדֵר בְּרֵאשִׁית בַּלַע הַלּוֹת = ṛw‘d bršwty bbyt 'ly (1 Chr 29:3), מֵאָד = m‘d (2 Chr 4:18), מּלָאכָה = ml‘h (1 Chr 28:21), כָּנָה = k‘w‘ (2 Chr 4:16), תְּכַהָּר = tḥŷw (2 Chr 4:15), יִרָבָב שְׁלֹה = wybe‘ šlmh (2 Chr 5:1), אָוָא = hw‘ (2 Chr 4:21), אֵש = hy‘ (2 Chr 5:2), קַנּוֹקֶשֶׁת = s‘n (2 Chr 5:6), but קַנּוֹקֶשֶׁת (spelled defective) = ḥqṣw (1 Chr 28:17).

In cases of a difference between qeri and ketib, the manuscript gives the qeri: ḥwrm = הָוָרָדֵר (qeri) instead of *ḥyrm (ketib, 2 Chr 4:11) and yrwšlm = יִרְוָשֶׁל (qeri; pausal) instead of *yrwšlm (ketib, 2 Chr 5:2).⁶

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³However, the dots seem to be written on yod and resh rather than on kaf and yod; also the lack of final waw is exceptional.

⁴For the general principles, see Geoffrey Khan, Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah (Cambridge University Library, Genizah Series 9; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 11–16, and idem, “The Orthography of Karaite Hebrew Bible Manuscripts in Arabic Transcription,” JSS 38 (1993) 49–70.

⁵In the Latin transliterations of the examples, diacritical distinctions are restored.

⁶At the beginning of this word there occurs an additional hook resembling bā‘, tā‘ or nūn which I am unable to explain as being more than a scribal mistake. The adherence to qeri is typical of the Karaite transcriptions of Hebrew, see Geoffrey Khan, “The Medieval Karaite Transcriptions of Hebrew into Arabic Script,” IOS 12 (1992) 157–176, esp 173–176.
الحروف العربية المشيدة الأولى من_above_تاء، لأنه في بعض الأحيان، فإن الآراء تتفق مع الفحص. 

{النص غير قابل للقراءة بشكل طبيعي، بناءً على الصورة المقدمة}
Although the principle of a letter-for-letter transliteration is observed very strictly, the following deviations from the Standard Tiberian text (Codex Leningradensis B19) occur in this manuscript.

(1) Arabic *plene* instead of Hebrew *defective*: קִסָּרָה = *haṭvrt* (1 Chr 28:18), מֹמֵנָה = *hmlywnwt* (2 Chr 4:14, twice), and מַרְפֵּה = *wnrwtyhm* (2 Chr 4:20).

(2) Arabic *defective* instead of Hebrew *plene*: לְהַבָּנִי = *wlbtnt* (1 Chr 28:18), הַבָּנִי = *htbn* (1 Chr 28:19), מְסִיר = *hsyr* (2 Chr 4:11), מְסִיר = *hksrt* (2 Chr 4:13), and מְסִיד = *hksrt* (with dagesh dots?, 2 Chr 4:14).

(3) Other deviations from the Standard Tiberian text: יִדְעֹה = *y’zbl* (i.e. without dagesh in the object suffix, 1 Chr 28:20), מֵאוֹלָו = *wmll’wym* (’alif and waw in reverse order, 1 Chr 29:2), לְהַבָּנִי = *r’šy h’bnt* (1 Chr 29:6), בֵּית לְהַבָּנִי = *byt-yh* (the symbol of the tetragrammaton, 1 Chr 29:7). יִרְשָׁמָו = *wsmtw h l’hm* (with ל added before ל, 1 Chr 29:9), and in 2 Chr 5:3 the preposition אֲנָא occurs twice (*l’l hmttly*).

All of the deviations make sense and they could be called textual variants. However, I have been unable to discover parallel peculiarities in the lists of variants. In the same way, the instances which reveal vacillation between *plene* and *defective* spellings of *holem* do not speak in favor of an incipient attempt to indicate the vowel length with the help of Arabic *matres lectionis*; this is demonstrated by the reverse cases in which Hebrew *plene* spellings of *holem* (and *hiriq*) have no counterpart in the Arabic transliteration. Although the transliteration is careful in the majority of cases, I am inclined to consider the deviations as being lapses of memory or lapses of the pen or due to carelessness as well as being reminiscent of similar verses; obviously the manuscript has been an exercise or otherwise lacking in official status.

In spite of a few mistakes, the manuscript Arab.-evr. 355 is the first example of a letter-for-letter transliteration among the Karaite transcriptions of biblical texts known to me. In other manuscripts the principle of transcription, i.e. an attempt to describe details of the actual pronunciation of the Hebrew text, has superseded the imitation of Hebrew orthography, to a certain extent at least. In respect of the

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7 ה יִב occurs in v. 8 in the Hebrew text and in its Arabic transliteration.

8 According to Khan (“Medieval Karaite Transcriptions,” 163–165), the consistent *plene* transcription of a and u vowels is the first step towards the Arabic-based indication of vowel length in Karaite transcriptions.

9 Khan, “Medieval Karaite Transcriptions,” 163, describes the manuscript B(ritish) L(ibrary)
preponderance of transliterational or transcriptional features, the manuscripts display great variation, and in fact, it is quite difficult to find two transcriptions with an identical system of transcription.\textsuperscript{10}

In his two recent articles, Geoffrey Khan endeavours to classify the Karaite transcriptions into six classes, the first three of which are based on the Hebrew system of \textit{matres lectionis} and the last three on the adaptations of the Arabic use of \textit{matres lectionis}.\textsuperscript{11} He admits, however, that “it is not clear whether this typological development in the orthography of the transcriptions has any chronological correlation.”\textsuperscript{12} However, he proposes that the employment of the ‘semi-Kufic’ type of Arabic script in a number of Hebrew-based transcriptions “may point to the Hebrew based system of orthography being earlier than the Arabic based one.”\textsuperscript{13}

Nevertheless, the round cursive script of the real Hebrew-based transliteration in Arab.-evr. 355 does not accord with the view of a chronological development from a Hebrew system towards the use of the Arabic habits of orthography.\textsuperscript{14} While the typological classification seems to offer appropriate tools for the description of Karaite transcriptions, it is a more complicated matter to determine genetic or chronological connections — the diversity of systems of transcription and the reading

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\textsuperscript{10}See Tapani Harviainen, “MS Arab.-evr. 2 of the Second Firkovitch Collection, a Karaite Bible Transcription in Arabic Script” (chapter “Comparisons”, forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{11}Khan, \textit{נכתב נגיעה}, esp. 468–470, and idem, “Orthography”.

\textsuperscript{12}Khan, “Orthography,” 50.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, and Khan, \textit{נכתב נגיעה}, 469–470.

\textsuperscript{14}However, ‘semi-Kufic’ script is used in the MS Firkovitch II, Arab.-evr. 48, in which the transcription system is “Arabic-based” (as if between classes 4 and 5 in Khan, “Orthography,” 60–66; the transliteration of quiescent ‘\textit{alef} deviates from all of his classes); the reading tradition reflected by this transcription is “Babylonian,” see Tapani Harviainen, “A Karaite Bible Transcription with Indiscriminate Use of Tiberian \textit{patah} and \textit{segol} Vowel Signs,” in: \textit{Semitica — Serta philologica Constantino Tsereteli dicata} (eds. R. Contini, F. A. Pennacchietti, M. Tosco; Pubblicazioni del gruppo di ricerca “Lessicografia semitica e lessico ebraico” finanziato dal C.N.R., n. 6; Torino: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 1993) 83–97.
traditions reflected by them as well as the provenances of these transcriptions appear to be more varied than has been thought.\textsuperscript{15}

In my opinion the Karaites inclination towards personal decision, on the one hand, and respect for different traditions, on the other, opened the door for a variety of experimental and competing attempts to describe certain features and details of Hebrew with the aid of the Arabic writing system. This method was very informative in some respects (esp. the actual length of Hebrew vowels) but caused new difficulties in other ones (esp. the treatment of quiescent Hebrew consonants, i.e. the opposition between the principles of transliteration and transcription); the attempts to overcome these defects led to new subdivisions. In addition, the great variety of Karaites reading traditions of biblical Hebrew had an important part to play in the rise and increase of different systems of transcription in various areas, periods and schools.\textsuperscript{16} Because of their complex nature the Karaites transliterations and transcriptions provide a great amount of new evidence for the history of the Hebrew language.


\textsuperscript{16}For the employment of Arabic script in Karaites manuscripts see Khan, “Medieval Karaites Transcriptions,” and Tapani Harvia, “Karaite Arabic Transcriptions of Hebrew in the Salteron-Shchedrin Public Library in St. Petersburg” \textit{(Estudios Masoreticos (X Congreso de la IOMS); En memoria de Harry M. Orlinsky)}; Editados por Emília Fernández Tejero y María Teresia Ortega Monasterio; Textos y estudios “Cardenal Cisneros” de la Biblia Políglota Matritense 55; Madrid: Instituto de Filología del CSIS, 1993) 63–72, esp. 63–65.
16: وسموره: وانا هرهب مسلق لسلحه به هرهب لسحد وسحد
17: وحسب لسلحه هكسفور: وهيرعون وهرعون وهفسفور
18: وهفطور ولحموري هرهب مسقف لفحور وفحور ولهفورر
19: هكسفور مسقف لفحور وفحور ولزيج: هقطورب هرهب مرفي
20: مسقف وليس هيركون هفرم رهم لفسفر وسحسرو عل
21: اورون رسب 2: هكل نحب مند 6: عل هسكفل كل ملاحوب
22: هسبر: وبارم دودج لسليم سو حري واص وعسه
23: ال سيا وال نحب كي 6: الهنم الهيح عي للسرفي ولا مسرحي عدد لحوب
24: كل ملاحوب عبودب سب 6: وهم مطقوب هفسبر وهفليوم
25: لحل عبودب سب فالهنم وعجج ححل ملايخا لحل نديب همحيب لحل
26: عمودب وهشبرم وحال ههم لحل دببرج: وبارم دودج هشبرج
27: لحل هفهل سليم سي احذ بحر مو الهنم بعور ورح وهفلام عدوته
28: كي لا لادم هشره كي ل6: الهنم: وحال كشي هجسمي لسب
29: الهن هرهب لرهب وهكسفور لكسفور وسحسرو لحسبر
30: هديرل لبررل وفصول لفصول اشي سيم وفصول اشي فوج
31: ورآهم وحال سمي هفرح واسب يمح سب للبر وعود برصبري سب
الله يس في النجوم، رحبت وحسب سى لسب الهدى معلم
[هكنتليسي لسب هفش: سلسب الهم ككري رحبت مرهب]
[وافيم، وحسب الهم ككري كسري مرهب] لطوى [كرروات هسم]
[ارأهبت لراهب ولكسف لكيسف ولحمه لملاحم، صد] [طرسم]
[وه sièsin امشدد] [بدو هفوم ل] [2: وسدبو راسي هاموب]
[وأسير سيطي سرسلا وسري هالنكم وهماب ولسري [ملاحب]
هبلح: ورسو لصومب سب 3 رحبت ككري حبسب الهم
[وادركم ربو وحسب ككري عصرب الهم وحسب ربو]
[وسوءب الهم ككري وبرزل ماه الف ككري] وهمصا امو
[السم سو لاوسر سب 3 عل بد محال هحصرسي: وسحو أخل]
[هم الم هدسم كي بلب سلم هندجو ل] [2: وعم دوي هبلح]
[وسرح دوبد اب 3 لحي]
ككل هفهل وبامر دوبد دروح ابه 3 الهي سرسل، امو
معولم وعد عوالم: لح [2] هجاوله واهصوره وهمبارب وهمصح
وههدوك كي حل اسم ومارض لح [2] هبلمح وهمبسنا لح
[الراس: وتعسر] وفكرب لمفسح انه موسد لكل
وَبَسَّطَ سُلْحُوبُ عَسْرِهِ وَبَيَّنَ بَيِّنَيْلِهِ [حَبْسِهِ مَمْهَلٍ وَحَمْسَةٍ]
[8] إِلَّا وَبَسَّطَ مَرْفِقُهُ رَهْبَ مَاهُ: وَبَسَطَ حَصْرُ هَكْبَرْبُوب
[9] [وَأَعْمَرَهُ هُجُدُولٍ وَدُلْبَوَاتُ لَعَرَرَهُ وَدُلْبُوهُمُ مُحْمَمَهُ]
[10] حَبْسِهِ: وَاتُ هَمَّ سُمُ مَكْسَ مَكْسُ بَيْنَ وَدُوْسَ [وُدُوْسَ] مَرْ كُيْنْعَهِ،
حُورَمُ لَعَسْوَبُ اَنْ هَمْ سُمُهُ اَسْرُ عَلَّهُ إِلَّةَ لِلْحَتِّ سُلْيَهُ سُبُب
[12] هَالِهِمُ: عَمْوُدُمُ سُمُ وَأَحَدُوْبُ وَأَهَكْلَوْبُ عَلَ رَاسِ هَوْمَادَمِ
[13] سُمُ وَأَحَدُوْبُ سُمُ لَعَسْوَبُ [وَاتُ سُمُ إِلَّاُوْبُ وَأَهَكْلَوْبُ]
[14] اَسْرُ عَلَ رَاسِ هَوْمَادَمِ: وَاتُ هُوْمَادَمُ اَرَاضِي مَاوَدُ بَيْنَ]
[15] هَسْوَبُوْبُ عَسْوَبُ [وَاتُ هُوْمَادَمُ اَرَاضِي مَاوَدُ بَيْنَ]
[16] سُمُ طَوْرُمُ رَفْوُمُ لَسْحَهُ هَالِهِمُ لَعَسْوَبُ اَنْ سُمُ
حُورَمُ هَكْبَرْ بَعْسُهُ اَسْرُ عَلَ هَوْمَادَمِ: وَاتُ هُوْمَادَمُ عَسْوَبُ [وَاتُ هُوْمَادَمُ]
[17] وَاتُ هَكْبَرْ بَعْسُهُ عَلَ هُوْمَادَمِ: وَاتُ هُوْمَادَمُ عَسْوَبُ [وَاتُ هُوْمَادَمُ] سُمُ عَسْرُ تَحْسُبُ: وَاتُ هُمْ سُمُوْبُ وَاتُ هُمُمُ وَاتُ هُمُمُ وَاتُ هُمُمُ وَاتُ هُمُمُ
[18] وَاتُ كُلٌّ كَلِّهِمُ عَسْبُهُ حُورَمُ اَسْرُ عَلَّهُ إِلَّةَ لِلْحَتِّ سُلْيَهُ سُبُب
[19] مُرْوُيِّ: طَحُورِ هَمْ سُمُتُ مَلْحُ مِلْبِيْ مَبَاهُمُ وَسْكُوْبُ
[20] وَسْكُوْبُ: وَاتُ هُمْ سُمُوْبُ كَلِّبُ وَأَلْحَمُ [قَالُ: اَرْبَ مَدَدُ كَيْ]
[21] لاَ بَحْرُ مَسْحُلُ هَحْسُبُ: وَاتُ هُمْ سُمُوْبُ كَلِّبُ وَأَلْحَمُ
1 Chr 4:19

20:1

21:1

22:1

5:1

2v

4:1

5:1

6:1

7:1

A Karaite Transliteration of Biblical Hebrew