2003

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TAFSĪR OF THE TORAH

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ABSTRACT

Saadiah Gaon's influential translation of the Torah into Arabic has long been known to contain countless "mistranslations," passages in which Saadiah consciously modifies the biblical text to conform to Arabic literary style or to his own beliefs and understanding of the Bible. Several of the modifications found in Saadiah's Tafsīr *derive from Islamic sources, including Islamic terminology and phraseology, Islamic law and tradition, and the Qur'an itself. This paper examines those passages in the* Tafsīr *of the Torah which reflect Islamic influence in an attempt to understand how, in a work written for a Jewish audience, Saadiah utilizes material gleaned from the dominant religion of his day and why on several occasions the gaon prefers Islamic interpretations over the existing rabbinic and biblical alternatives.*

Saadiah Gaon's translation of the Torah into Arabic is considered by Joshua Blau, perhaps the foremost living scholar of Judeo-Arabic, to be "the most influential mediaeval Judeo-Arabic work."[1] The translation, known in Arabic as the *Tafsīr*, appears to have become the universally accepted Arabic rendition of the Pentateuch among rabbinic Jews within decades of its completion in the early 10th century, and it continues to be used to this day. Saadiah's *Tafsīr* occupies a role similar to Onkelos' better-known Aramaic Targum of the Torah as an authoritative translation popularly studied in religious circles alongside the Hebrew original. In terms of its impact on Jewish culture, Saadiah's biographer Henry Malter ranks the *Tafsīr* alongside such influential works as the Septuagint and Moses Mendelssohn's German translation of the Bible; Malter credits the work with inaugurating the Golden Age of Jewish literary activity in the Arabic-speaking world.[2]

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[1] J. Blau, "Some Instances Reflecting the Influence of Saadya Gaon's Bible Translation on Later Judeo-Arabic Writings," in *Occident and Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of Alexander Scheiber*, ed. R. Dan (Leiden, 1988), p. 21.

[2] H. Malter, *Saadiah Gaon: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia, 1921), p. 142.

One can consider all translations to be interpretations to some extent, and the Arabic word *tafsīr* itself means "explanation" or "interpretation." As Meira Polliack points out, "Saadiah's awareness of the interpretive nature of his translation of the Pentateuch may explain its designation as *tafsīr*; a term which better conveys this sense than the term *tarjamah*" used by later Karaite translators of the Torah.[3] Indeed, Saadiah's work, especially in light of its Karaite counterparts, is particularly noteworthy for its extensive deviations from the Hebrew original. Scholars have pointed out countless examples of these "mistranslations" and have identified several factors that account for Saadiah's changes. One important factor seems to have been generally overlooked, however, even though examples of its application have themselves been duly noted. On several occasions, Saadiah deviates from the biblical text or its standard rabbinic understanding in favor of an interpretation drawn from the Qurʾan or other Islamic sources. An analysis of how Saadiah uses Islamic terms and sources in his *Tafsīr* of the Torah casts new light on the gaon's attitude toward the dominant religion of his time and toward its texts and traditions.

SAADIAH AND HIS *TAFSĪR*

The outline of Saadiah's biography has been pieced together by modern scholars, but the details remain uncertain. Saadiah was born in 882 in the Fayyūm district of Upper Egypt, spent some time in the Land of Israel, and by the early 920s was an important figure in Rabbanite circles and the most forceful advocate of the Babylonian position in a rabbinic calendrical dispute. In 928 he was appointed to the position of Gaon of Sura, head of one of the two major rabbinic schools located in Baghdad. Other than a short period in exile due to a controversy with the political head of the Babylonian Jewish community, he remained in that post until his death in 942.[4] Saa-

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[3] M. Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation: A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E.* (Leiden, 1997), p. 86.

[4] Malter's *Saadiah Gaon*, written in the 1920s, remains the only book-length treatment of Saadiah's life in English, although several details of Malter's account (such as Saadiah's year of birth) have been proven incorrect on the basis of evidence from the Cairo Genizah. See A. Marx, "Rab Saadia Gaon," in *Rab Saadia Gaon: Studies in His Honor*, ed. L. Finkelstein (New York, 1944), pp. 53–97, for a briefer biography

diah's writings include works on grammar and astronomy, biblical and halakhic commentary, and, the field with which he is perhaps most associated, philosophy. For the most part, however, it is unclear when Saadiah wrote each of his works, and the date of the *Tafsīr*'s composition has been the subject of much scholarly conjecture. Malter states that the *Tafsīr* was most likely begun while Saadiah was still in Egypt and was revised subsequently; Polliack suggests that Saadiah may have begun his work while in Tiberias but that most of it was composed in Baghdad, while Edward Robertson dates the composition in its entirety to Saadiah's tenure as gaon.[5]

Although there were earlier translations of the Torah into Arabic, Saadiah's *Tafsīr* was the first to gain general acceptance throughout the Arabic-speaking Jewish world; the work's rapid and widespread dissemination can presumably be credited to its quality and to the renown of its author.[6] Saadiah was the first Arabic translator to stray from a stilted, word-for-word rendering of the biblical text. Quite the contrary, Saadiah took great liberty in preparing his translation. Many of his changes result from the imposition of his own philosophical and theological beliefs onto the Torah, so as to bring its plain meaning into conformity with both reason and rabbinic tradition. Saadiah justifies this approach to translation in the introduction to his *Commentary on Genesis*, in which he asserts that "it is

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that takes into account the significant information about Saadiah's life discovered in the Genizah.

[5] Malter, *Saadiah Gaon*, p. 141; Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 77; E. Robertson, "The Relationship of the Arabic Translation of the Samaritan Pentateuch to That of Saadya," in *Saadya Studies: In Commemoration of the One Thousandth Anniversary of the Death of R. Saadya Gaon*, ed. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Manchester, 1943), p. 167.

[6] J. Blau, "ʿIyyunim bi-Ketav Yad Mizraḥi mi-Tchilat ha-Meʾah ha-11 shel Targum Rasag la-Torah," *Leshonenu* 51 (1998) 111. On Arabic translations of the Torah that preceded Saadiah's *Tafsīr*, see J. Blau, "On a Fragment of the Oldest Judaeo-Arabic Bible Translation Extant," in *Genizah Research after Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic*, eds. J. Blau and S. Reif (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 31–39; Y. Tobi, "Seridei Targum ʿAravi la-Torah Qodem le-Tafsir Rav Saadiah Gaon," *Mesorot* 7 (1993) 87–127; Y. Tobi, "Targum ʿAravi-Yehudi ʿAmmami Nosaf la-Torah," in *Meḥqarim be-Lashon ha-ʿIvrit uve-Leshonot ha-Yehudim Mugashim le-Shelomo Morag*, ed. M. Bar-Asher (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 481–501; M. Polliack, "Arabic Bible Translations in the Cairo Genizah Collection," *Jewish Studies in a New Europe* (Copenhagen, 1996) pp. 610–614; Y. Tobi, "ʿAl Qadmuto shel Tirgumei ha-Miqra be-ʿAravit Yehudit ve-Qetaʿ mi-Tirgum ʿAravi-Yehudi Qadum la-Miqra," in *Bein ʿEver le-ʿArav*, ed. Y. Tobi (Tel Aviv, 2001), pp. 17–60.

incumbent upon anyone who interprets [the Bible] that he consider [passages] that are in accordance with the rational principles which precede them and the traditions which follow them as reflecting clear language (*muḥkamāt*) and that he consider [passages] that contradict one of these to be ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*)."[7] Passages that are "ambiguous" must be clarified in light of reason and tradition. So, for example, Saadiah consistently eliminates anthropomorphic references to God. As he explains in his commentary on Ps 2:4, "verbs of action which refer to God, such as 'He descended,' 'He went up,' and are rationally inadmissible have to be transferred to agents and to be translated 'He made one descend,' 'He caused someone to go up.' "[8] In the *Tafsīr* of the Torah, Saadiah applies this principle by translating references to God's physical presence as *nūr allāh*, "the light of God,"[9] as well as making numerous other changes such as rendering "God said" in the creation narrative (Genesis 1) as "God willed," and "The Lord came down" (Exod 19:20) as "The Lord revealed Himself."[10] An example of rabbinic influence on the *Tafsīr* can be seen in Saadiah's translation of "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Exod 23:19, 34:26; Deut 14:21) as "You shall not eat meat with milk."[11]

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[7] For the Judeo-Arabic of this passage, see M. Zucker, ed., *Perushei Rav Seʿadiah Gaʾon li-Breshit* (New York, 1984), p. 17; Zucker offers a Hebrew translation on p. 191. On the parallel usage of the terms *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* in Islamic literature, see below, n. 21.

[8] A. S. Halkin, "Saadia's Exegesis and Polemics," in *Rab Saadia Gaon*, ed. L. Finkelstein, p. 126.

[9] Saadiah consistently uses this phrase when translating verses referring to God's physical presence in which Onkelos uses the word *yeqara* to modify God's name; on all occasions in which Saadiah deviates from this pattern, he either translates the biblical text without anti-anthropomorphic modification or instead modifies the structure of the verse. The phrase *nūr allāh* occasionally appears in the gaon's translations of other verses as well, including Num 11:2 (where Onkelos uses the word *meimra*). On the possibility that Saadiah borrowed this term from Arabic-speaking Christian communities, see below, n. 73.

[10] All English translations from the Bible, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Jewish Publication Society's 1985 translation of the Tanakh. Throughout this work, all emphases have been added.

[11] This example is among those which Saadiah himself cites in the introduction to his *Commentary*; see Zucker, ed., *Perushei Rav Seʿadiah*, pp. 18, 192. Saadiah's examples of non-rational verses that require interpretation are Gen 3:20 (Eve is not "the mother of all the living" but merely "the mother of all the living that are rational and mortal") and Deut 4:24 (God is not "a consuming fire," but rather God's punishment

The *Tafsīr*, as Polliack has amply demonstrated, also reflects the influence of Arabic language and culture. Polliack characterizes Saadiah's translation, in contrast to the later Karaite translations by Yefet b. ʿEli and Yeshuʿah b. Yehudah, as being "communicative" in its purpose. "This type of translation required him to adopt intrinsic forms of the Arabic language and to assimilate recognizable elements of its style."[12] She emphasizes that Saadiah, unlike his Karaite counterparts, is more willing to translate biblical words using their semantic equivalents rather than using cognate words.[13] Saadiah also rephrases biblical sentences to conform to culturally derived standards of proper literary style, without regard to the evident style of the Torah itself. This can be seen clearly in his translation of Genesis 1, in which the biblical formula which concludes each paragraph of the creation narrative, "And there was evening and there was morning a *x* day," is consistently recast as an introductory clause to the paragraph which follows: "And after the evening and morning of the *x* day passed. . . ."[14] Polliack suggests that Saadiah's "inclination to alter original elements of the biblical text in response to extra-textual concerns is yet another manifestation of this assimilation, when viewed from a cultural perspective. In this measure Saadiah catered to the concerns of Jews whose religious, intellectual, and aesthetic norms were deeply influenced by the Arab culture and Muslim environment in which they lived."[15] I would agree with this statement but emphasize that cultural considerations were not the only or even the primary motivations for interpretive translations resulting from "extra-textual concerns"; Saadiah's own explanation for these alterations, as expressed in the introduction to his *Commentary*, seems to me to be more directly relevant in many cases. Additionally, the mere fact that Saadiah was conscious of his audience's assimilation into an Islamic culture does not always

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can be so described). Saadiah also explains that one needs to use interpretive translation to reconcile contradictory biblical passages, citing the apparent contradiction between Deut 6:16 ("Do not try the Lord your God") and Mal 3:10 ("Put me to the test—said the Lord of Hosts").

[12] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 276.

[13] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, pp. 170–173. On Saadiah's use of cognates in the *Tafsīr*, see below, n. 22.

[14] Polliack discusses this example in a slightly different context; see *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 112.

[15] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 276.

account for why he altered specific original elements of the biblical text as he did.

One feature of the *Tafsir* has prompted some speculation with regard to Saadiah's intended audience. Saadiah regularly translates biblical names and locations into Arabic even without clear evidence that his translation is accurate. The 12th-century commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra, who frequently cites and often rejects Saadiah's translational interpretations, comments acerbically that

> [Saadiah] did this with families, cities, animals, birds, and rocks. Maybe he saw them in a dream. And he certainly erred in some cases, as I will explain in their proper places. If so, we should not rely on his dreams. Perhaps he did this for the glory of God. Because he translated the Torah in the language of Ishmael and in their script, [he translated unknown Hebrew words] so that they will not say that the Torah contains commandments [*miṣwot*; in some manuscripts *milot*, "words"] which [the Jews] do not understand.[16]

On the basis of this comment, some scholars have argued that Saadiah, breaking with the universal Rabbanite practice of using Hebrew characters, wrote the *Tafsir* in Arabic script for an Islamic audience. Moshe Zucker, however, forcefully argued that, Ibn Ezra's comment notwithstanding, Saadiah did indeed write the *Tafsir* in Hebrew script. This argument has been bolstered by the fact that no texts of the *Tafsir* in Arabic script have been found in any of the Genizah collections. On the contrary, Blau recently discovered an 11th-century manuscript of the *Tafsir* written in Hebrew script, which he says is proof that the original work must also have been written in the same manner.[17] As Muslims at the time could not read Hebrew or Hebrew characters,[18] this clearly indicates that Saadiah wrote his translation of the Torah with a Jewish audience in mind, an assumption supported by Saadiah's own description of his work.

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[16] Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Perushei ha-Torah le-Rabbenu Avraham ben Ezra ʿal pi Kitvei Yad u-Defusim Rishonim*, ed. A. Weiser (Jerusalem, 1976), reprinted in *Torat Hayyim* (Jerusalem, 1986), Gen 2:11. The translation is my own.

[17] M. Zucker, *ʿAl Targum Rasag la-Torah* (New York, 1959), pp. 284–285. On the corroboration of Zucker's argument from genizah sources, see Blau, "'Iyyunim," p. 112 and Tobi, "Seridei Targum," p. 113.

[18] E. Ashtor, *Toledot ha-Yehudim be-Mitsrayim ve-Suriah taḥat Shilton ha-Mamlukim* (Jerusalem, 1944), 1:359.

Saadiah, in the introduction to the *Tafsir*, states that he wrote it

> because someone asked me to set apart the plain text of the Torah into a distinct work that would not include any words of philology . . . and would not include any questions of the heretics or the responses to them, nor details of rational law or how to perform traditional law, but rather a publication solely of the meaning of the text of the Torah.

The longer work to which Saadiah alludes here, which includes the *Commentary on Genesis*, no longer exists in its entirety, although it may have been known to Ibn Ezra and other medieval commentators; it is clear, however, that the *Tafsir* was intended to serve a different and more limited function. Yet although Saadiah states that his work is intended to reflect "the plain text of the Torah" (*basīṭ naṣṣ al-tawra*), he acknowledges that it is not a literal translation. As he says further on, this work is "solely a translation of the plain text of the Torah, made accurate on the basis of the knowledge of reason and tradition. And if it is possible for me to insert a certain word or letter through which the meaning and intention will be revealed to one for whom an allusion is more satisfactory than a statement, I have done this."[19] On the basis of this introduction and the gaon's known interests and ideological commitments, modern scholars have ascribed to Saadiah several goals in writing the *Tafsir*. In addition to his stated objective of providing a clear translation of the plain meaning of the Torah, Saadiah was interested in the education and guidance of the assimilated Jewish masses who no longer understood Hebrew, the reconciliation of the Torah with reason and

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[19] J. Derenbourg, ed., *Tafsir al-Turia* [sic] *biʾl-ʿArabiyya* (Paris, 1893), p. 4. This work constitutes the first volume of an unfinished collection of Saadiah's work titled *Al-Tafāsir, al-Kutub, waʾl-Rasāʾil* (The *Tafsir*s, Books, and Letters). Derenbourg provides a Hebrew translation of Saadiah's introduction; this English translation, based on Derenbourg's text of the original, is my own. For a complete English translation in light of a variant manuscript, see Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, pp. 82–84. For a complete Hebrew translation in light of different variant manuscripts, see Zucker, *ʿAl Targum Rasag*, pp. 128–129.

Unless specifically noted, all citations of Saadiah's *Tafsir* are taken from the Derenbourg edition, despite the widely recognized faults of this work. I have consulted several manuscripts and editions of the *Tafsir* to confirm the accuracy of those passages that are key to my arguments and have found that, except for one instance, there are no significant discrepancies among the texts. I discuss that one exception in detail below, p. 374, and mention minor variants in the notes.

rabbinic tradition, and the refutation of heretical and particularly Karaite beliefs.[20]

It is my contention that Saadiah deliberately and selectively relied on Islamic sources in order to advance several of these goals. Saadiah's *Tafsīr* shows evidence of conscious attention by the author to the stylistic expectations of his assimilated audience and of his use of specifically Islamic terms, traditions, and sources to provide more detailed or more rationally acceptable interpretations of certain biblical passages. Islamic influence has been identified in Saadiah's grammatical, philosophical, and exegetical works,[21] so it is not especially

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[20] See Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, pp. 8–9, 319; Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 22; E. Schlossberg, "Ha-Megamot ha-Ḥevratiot shel Ḥiburei Rav Seʿadiah Gaʾon," *Asufot* 6 (1992) 71–85.

[21] Saadiah's Hebrew grammatical treatise, the *Agron*, shows signs of inspiration and borrowing from Arabic sources, which Saadiah himself indirectly credits for prompting his decision to write the work; see Malter, *Saadiah Gaon*, pp. 39–40. One can also clearly see Islamic influence in Saadiah's philosophical works, which contain the same structure, principles, and arguments as contemporary *muʿtazilī* treatises; see H. Hailperin, "Saadia's Relation to Islamic and Christian Thought," *Historia Judaica* 4 (1942) 2–16, and Zucker, ed., *Perushei Rav Seʿadiah*, p. 19, n. 5. (*Muʿtazilism* is a school of Islamic thought that relies heavily on rationalism and borrows from Greek philosophical traditions.)

Saadiah is the first rabbinic commentator to base his biblical interpretation on philological and rational principles, as was standard in qurʾanic interpretation of his day. His reliance on the concepts of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* in his theory of interpretation (see above, p. 356) parallels that of qurʾanic exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, an important Islamic figure who lived in Baghdad shortly before Saadiah's own time; the terms themselves are found in Qurʾan 3:7 (in the Egyptian versification). See Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, pp. 234–236; Zucker, ed., *Perushei Rav Seʿadiah*, pp. 35–40; E. Schlossberg, "Rasag: Rav Seʿadiah Gaʾon Parshan ha-Miqraʾ," *Maḥanayim* 3 (1993) 76–91. For an analysis of the various approaches taken by Islamic commentators to these terms, see L. Kinberg, "*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35 (1988) 143. For a specific instance in which Saadiah may have been influenced by the content of al-Ṭabarī's commentary, see below, p. 392.

Eliezer Schlossberg has argued that the exegetical *tafsir* on Daniel and the *Commentary on Genesis* contain indirect polemicization against Islam, expressed in Saadiah's complaints about the treatment of Jews under Islam, his refutations of arguments known to be made by Islamic polemicists, and his reinterpretations of biblical verses said to advance Islamic claims. Schlossberg, who wrote his dissertation on the subject of Saadiah's *tafsir* on Daniel, relies heavily on this work in his argument that the gaon engaged in anti-Islamic polemic; see, for example, E. Schlossberg, "Yaḥaso shel Rasag le-Islam," *Daʿat* 25 (1990) 21–51. Daniel J. Lasker, who reinterprets many of the works Schlossberg considers to be anti-Islamic as being primarily anti-Christian,

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surprising to find it in this work of translation as well. There are a handful of scholars who have identified select examples of such influence in the *Tafsīr*, and I have incorporated their arguments into this work. I have arranged the examples that follow so as to begin with those which may be explained largely on the basis of Polliack's thesis of Islamic cultural influence on Saadiah's work, whether unconscious or, more probably, conscious in nature. I then proceed to passages from the *Tafsīr* that can be explained only on the basis of conscious borrowing on the part of the gaon from specifically Islamic sources.

ISLAMIC TERMINOLOGY AND PHRASEOLOGY: *IMĀM, RASŪL, ANĀ ALLĀH*

Polliack cites as a point of distinction between Saadiah and his Karaite counterparts the fact that the former frequently uses Islamic religious terms and expressions whereas the latter avoids such terms and prefer to use Arabic cognates of biblical words.[22] Her primary example is Saadiah's translation of the Hebrew *kohen*, "priest," as *imām*. Although the word *imām* does have the general meaning of "any exemplar" or "leader," it is most strongly associated with its Islamic religious sense of a "person whose example is followed . . .

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also acknowledges the anti-Islamic nature of the *tafsir* on Daniel; see, for example, D. J. Lasker, "Neged Mi Hitpalmes Rav Seʿadiyah Gaon be-Diyyuno he-Biṭul ha-Torah?" *Daʿat* 32–33 (1994) 5–11. See also E. Schlossberg, "Ofav u-Megamato ha-Parshanit shel Perush Rav Seʿadiah Gaon le-Sefer Daniel," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 56 (1990) 5–15 of the Hebrew section, which briefly discusses polemical activity in the *Commentary on Genesis* as well. Schlossberg does not make much use of the *Tafsir* of the Torah in this argument, nor does he appear to notice the instances in which Saadiah does not refute but rather adopts Islamic interpretations.

[22] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 174. Although Polliack may be correct that Saadiah is relatively less likely than Yefet and Yeshuʿah to use cognate words in his translation, Saadiah most certainly does rely on cognates in numerous translations, even when a different Arabic word might be more accurate. This tendency was noted by Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, p. 267. To cite just a few examples drawn from translations cited elsewhere in this work, Saadiah translates *tevah* (Noah's "ark") as *tābūt* (box or chest) rather than *fulk* or *safīna* (boat) (see below, n. 74), the color *ṣahov* (yellow) as *aṣhab* (blond or light yellow) rather than *aṣfar* (see below, p. 390), and *meʾaddamim* (reddened, with reference to animal skins) as *adīm* (tanned).

in prayer." The word also conveys a specifically Islamic connotation, as "leader of the Muslims."[23] The Qur'an refers to Muhammad as the imam par excellence, and Shi'is use the term specifically to refer to the holy descendants of the Prophet. Despite the word's Islamic overtones, however, Saadiah has no qualms using it to refer to Aaron and his descendants even though he could have instead used the Arabic word *kāhin*, cognate with the Hebrew *kohen*.[24] Presumably, Saadiah preferred *imām* in part because the word *kāhin* bears the unwanted connotations of "diviner" or "astrologer."[25] Saadiah's choice of the more appropriate word despite its Islamic connotations reflects the gaon's goal of producing "a target text which is orientated towards the language and culture of the reader," as Polliack suggests,[26] as well as his lack of concern about using words associated with the dominant religion of his day.

Saadiah's use of Islamic terminology in the *Tafsīr* is quite nuanced at times, as can be seen in his use of the Islamic phrase *rasūl allāh*, "messenger of God," in reference to Moses.[27] The distinction between the words *rasūl* and *nabī*, both of which refer to prophets, is foreign to Hebrew and unknown in talmudic literature. In the Qur'an and Islamic thought, however, the former term is used for an elite subset of prophets, specifically those bearing written revelations. Wilhelm Bacher notes that Saadiah is not the only medieval Jewish figure to refer to Moses as *rasūl allāh*, and that in fact this term was often used in the context of anti-Islamic polemic designed to counter the Islamic contention that Moses was less worthy of divine revelation than Muhammad.[28] Adolf Schmiedl, however, rejects Bacher's suggestion that the mere reference to Moses as *rasūl allāh* could be polemical, noting that the Qur'an itself recognizes

[23] E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (1863; repr., Cambridge, 1984), s.v. '.m.

[24] Polliack notes that Karaite translators generally prefer the word *kāhin*, but occasionally use the word *imām*; see *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 174. Blau, "Some Instances," p. 22, notes that the translation of *kohen* as *imām* is also found in the 10th-century Karaite works of Ḥefeṣ b. Yaṣliah, Qirqisani, and David b. Abraham al-Fasi; Blau attributes this to the influence of Saadiah's *Tafsīr* on later translators.

[25] See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. '.r.f., who follows al-Jāwharī (Iraq, d. early 11th century) in associating the word *kāhin* with '*arrāf*.

[26] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 260.

[27] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 174, notes that Yefet and Yeshu'ah refrain from using this phrase.

[28] W. Bacher, "Notizen zu Saadja's Pentateuchübersetzung I," *MGWJ* 45 (1901) 565–566.

Moses' status as a *rasūl allāh* (Qur'an 61:5).[29] Whether or not Saadiah uses this phrase for polemical purposes, it is clear that the gaon is careful in his use of *rasūl allāh* not to contradict in any way the Islamic understanding of the term.

Saadiah's selective use of the term *rasūl* can be seen in his translations of verses in which Moses is referred to as an *'eved*, "servant": the gaon only translates the word *'eved* in reference to Moses as *rasūl* in contexts that conform to the Islamic conception of a *rasūl* as a leader of the people and representative of God on earth. At the conclusion of the dramatic depiction of the Children of Israel's escape through the Sea of Reeds and the drowning of the Egyptians, Exod 14:30–31 reports:

> Thus the Lord delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians, Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; they had faith in the Lord and His servant Moses.

The clear focus of this passage is on God's power; the people's faith in Moses is the result of their belief in the might of God. Saadiah therefore translates the end of Exod 14:31 as *wa-amanū bi-llāh wabi-Mūsā rasūlihi*, "they had faith in the Lord and His messenger Moses," reflecting Moses' role as God's apostle or emissary. So too in relating Moses' death, Saadiah highlights this role by translating *'eved YHWH* as *rasūl allāh* (Deut 34:5). In another passage, however, Saadiah twice translates the word *'eved* literally, even though it refers to Moses. Numbers 12 recounts the incident in which Aaron and Miriam speak badly about their brother and are taken to task by God for their indiscretion.

> And He said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted

[29] A. Schmiedl, "Randbemerkungen zu Saadja's Pentateuchübersetzung," *MGWJ* 46 (1902) 362–363. This is the third and final installment in a series of articles Schmiedl wrote in *MGWJ* from 1901–1902 with this title; Bacher's discussion of *rasūl* occurs in his response to the first of Schmiedl's articles. Islamic tradition accords the status of *rasūl* to numerous prophets, including Moses and Jesus; it merely asserts that Muhammad was the last and greatest of these messengers.

All references to qur'anic passages in this work cite the standard Egyptian versification.

throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly
and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord. How then
did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!" (Num
12:6–8)

The word *'eved* is used here as part of an analogy: just as a trusted
servant has access to his master's entire household while others do
not, so too does Moses possess a closer relationship with God than
do other prophets. This passage provides what one could call a bib-
lical counterpart to the qur'anic distinction between a *nabī* and a *ra-
sūl*, but if Saadiah were to have used the latter term in this context
he would have destroyed the analogy that expresses this distinction.
Furthermore, the Moses of Numbers 12 is presented not as the great
leader of the people and messenger of God, but rather as a humble
individual; he is *'avdi*, "My servant," not *'eved YHWH*, "the servant
of the Lord." Saadiah, sensitive to the meaning and connotations of
the Islamic phrase *rasūl allāh*, incorporates it into his *Tafsīr* where
it best expresses the force of the biblical Hebrew but offers a more
literal translation when the Islamic phrase would be inappropriate.

A similar pattern can be seen in Saadiah's translation of the word
ish, "man," when referring to Moses. Deut 33:1, which introduces
the final blessings Moses bestows upon the Children of Israel before
his death, describes Moses as *ish ha-elohim*, "the man of God." In
translating this phrase as *rasūl allāh*, Saadiah emphasizes Moses'
special relationship with God and the divine source of the blessings
which Moses transmits to the people.[30] Exod 11:3 reads, "The Lord
disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people. Moreover,
Moses himself [*ha-ish Moshe*, literally: the man Moses] was much
esteemed in the land of Egypt, among Pharaoh's courtiers and
among the people." Saadiah translates *ha-ish Moshe* as *Mūsā al-
rasūl*, strengthening the connection between the two halves of this
verse and expressing the reason for the Egyptians' high regard for
Moses.[31] Saadiah does not, however, alter his translation of Exod

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[30] This is one of several modifications Saadiah makes in his translation of the open-
ing lines of Moses' final benediction in order to stress that Moses himself is not the
source of the blessings but functions rather as an intermediary able to transmit God's
blessings to the people and to intercede before God on their behalf.

[31] See Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, p. 275, who cites Saadiah's *Commentary* on this
verse. Not all of the manuscripts and editions preserve the same language here. The
rendering *Mūsā al-rasūl* appears in the Derenbourg, Tāj, and Polyglot editions; the

32:1 and 32:23, in which the people demand that Aaron make them a
god because "that man Moses" had not descended from Mount Sinai.
Since Islamic tradition maintains that God always guarantees the
success of each *rasūl*, it would have been incongruous for the Chil-
dren of Israel to acknowledge Moses' apostolic status while express-
ing fear regarding his whereabouts and demanding a replacement.
Rather, the reason for the people's lack of faith was that they con-
sidered Moses to be merely a mortal and, despairing of his where-
abouts, sought another conduit to God.[32] Saadiah's judicious use of
the phrase *rasūl allāh* indicates his thorough familiarity with the nu-
ances of this Islamic concept and his interest in incorporating it
properly into his translation of the Torah, perhaps in part to ensure
that no reader would think that Moses was not a true *rasūl*.

Zucker, who notes the example of *ha-ish Moshe* but not *'eved
YHWH* or *kohen*, cites several additional occasions on which Saadiah
employs expressions taken from Islamic religious literature.[33] He
associates the gaon's use of the word *hall* in Exod 12:32, referring
to the sacrifices the Israelites were to offer upon leaving Egypt, with
the qur'anic passages which prohibit the consumption of meat which
has been offered in sacrifice (*uhilla*) by anyone other than God
(Qur'an 2:173, 6:145, 16:116). Saadiah, like JPS, translates Deut
30:6a as "Then the Lord your God will open up your heart . . ." even
though the text literally reads "circumcise your heart"; the phrase
which Saadiah uses, *wa-yashrah . . . ṣadraka*, appears in Qur'an
6:125, 20:25, and 94:1. Zucker also points out the Islamic reso-
nances of other words used by Saadiah, such as the term *andād* to
refer to idols in Lev 26:30, *shafa'atu* to refer to Moses' interces-
sionary activity in Deut 9:18 and 9:25, forms of the verb *istakhlafa*

14th century Yemenite MS JTSA Lutzki 647 contains *Mūsā rasūl allāh*, more closely
approximating the traditional Islamic formula. Both Derenbourg's Yemenite manuscript
and MS JTSA 5556 (a 19th century manuscript from Jerusalem in Yemenite script)
translate the phrase literally as *Mūsā al-rajl*.

[32] The word *ish* is also used to describe Moses in Exod 4:10 ("But Moses said to
the Lord, Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words . . .") and Num 12:3
("Now Moses was a very humble man . . ."). In both of these cases, the *Tafsīr* does not
contain a direct parallel to the Hebrew word *ish*, for reasons unrelated to the gaon's
interpretation of these verses.

[33] Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, pp. 274–275; I have altered Zucker's qur'anic refer-
ences to conform to the standard Egyptian versification and added one biblical refer-
ence (Deut 6:5) to his list.

(related to *khalīfa*) to refer to appointed successors in Lev 6:15, Num 27:16, and Deut 31:23, and the word *mukhlisan*, "faithfully," which Saadiah appends to the command to love God with all of one's heart and soul (Deut 4:29, 6:5, 10:12).[34]

Saadiah uses not only Islamic terms in his *Tafsīr*, but also Islamic forms of speech. A clear example of this can be seen in his translation of the phrase *ani YHWH*, "I am the Lord," and its variants. When this phrase is unmodified in the biblical text (e.g., Lev 19:3, 19:18), Saadiah regularly augments it with one of over a dozen adjectival or verbal descriptions of God, such as *al-wāḥid*, "the One" (e.g., Lev 19:4), *al-muʿāqib*, "the Punisher" (e.g., Lev 19:16), and *ujāzikum khairan*, "I will reward you well" (e.g., Lev 19:10).[35] When the Torah offers its own descriptions of God, Saadiah frequently re-arranges the sentence structure so that the description immediately follows the phrase *anā allāh*; so, for example, Saadiah renders the conclusion of Lev 19:2, *ki qadosh ani YHWH eloheikhem*, as *la-anni allāh rabbukum al-quddūs*, as if the Hebrew read *ki ani YHWH elo-heikhem ha-qadosh*.[36] As a result of Saadiah's modifications, nearly every occurrence of the phrase *anā allāh* in the *Tafsīr* is followed immediately by a description of God or of God's actions, whether such a description appeared in the original verse, was relocated from elsewhere in the original verse, or was inserted by Saadiah him-self.[37] Yehudah Ratzaby has identified three instances in which rab-

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[34] Wilhelm Bacher, in *Abraham Ibn Esra's Einleitung zu seinem Pentateuch-Com-mentar* (Vienna, 1876), p. 34, notes that Saadiah's translation of Psalms uses Islamic terminology for the words "priest," "king," and "minister" (*imām, khalīfa,* and *wazīr,* respectively). I have not found the last of these terms employed in the *Tafsir* of the Torah. Saadiah does use the word *sulṭan* and other forms of this root (e.g., Gen 42:6), but I would not ascribe this to Islamic influence, in part because the root is cognate with the Hebrew *shaliṭ*, which appears in the biblical text. Furthermore, the Arabic term *sulṭan* is known to have taken on the specific connotation of a political leader only in the decades after Saadiah's death, and it does not connote any sense of religious authority. See J. H. Kramers, "Sulṭān," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 2nd ed., 9:849–853.

[35] Y. Ratzaby, "Darkhei Tirgum shel Maṭbeʿa Miqraʾi be-Tafsir R. Seʿadiah," *Bet Miqra* 41 (1995–1996) 249–252, presents two versions of a list of these modifications. Unfortunately, both lists are incomplete and contain inaccurate references.

[36] JPS renders this clause in the same way that Saadiah does: "for I, the Lord your God, am holy." Saadiah appends the descriptive adjective *al-quddūs* to the conclusion of Lev 20:7 as well.

[37] Of the eighty-five occurrences of a phrase related to *ani YHWH* in the Bible, Saa-diah augments forty-five and modifies the sentence structure of ten; twenty instances

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binic sources add a description of God to the phrase *ani YHWH*, but he is otherwise unable to account for why Saadiah feels compelled to make these modifications.[38]

This pattern strikes me as being modeled after well-known Is-lamic phrases. Throughout the Qurʾan, references to God are fol-lowed by descriptive adjectives; the most prominent example is the *basmala*, the phrase introducing nearly every *sūra*, which is com-monly translated as "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compas-sionate." The *basmala* became the standard opening of written texts and ritual activities during the earliest years of Islam and would un-doubtedly have been familiar to all who lived in the Islamic world. One can reasonably infer that Saadiah's practice of appending de-scriptive adjectives to God's name stems in no small measure from the parallel Islamic practice. Yet Saadiah does not feel bound by the specific descriptions of God found in Islamic texts. Although *al-quddūs* and *al-wāḥid* both appear in the Qurʾan, the remainder of Saadiah's descriptions do not, and Saadiah never uses the most com-mon qurʾanic epithets—*al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* from the *basmala*—pre-sumably for the simple reason that they do not fit well into the context of the biblical *ani YHWH* passages. Saadiah uses specific Islamic words and a particularly Islamic literary style because he considers them to be accurate, or useful for his purposes, or simply most suitable for an assimilated Jewish audience. He does not, how-ever, engage in wholesale copying merely to create parallels be-tween the Qurʾan and his *Tafsir*.

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required no modifications to fit Saadiah's pattern. (These numbers come from an analysis of Derenbourg's edition and include two instances of augmentation that ap-pear in manuscripts consulted by Derenbourg but do not appear in his primary text.) Of the ten remaining phrases, five come in the context of statements proving God's existence and three introduce declarative statements made by God; neither structure lends itself to Saadiah's pattern, so the gaon did not modify these verses. On two oc-casions (Lev 18:2, 26:44), Saadiah seems to be content with the biblical *eloheikhem/ eloheihem* (your/their God) as a sufficiently appropriate description of God, even though in other contexts he feels the need to supplement these words with his own descriptions.

[38] Ratzaby, "Darkhei Tirgum," pp. 249–250. Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan each modify this phrase once (in Exod 8:18 and Lev 20:7, respectively), and Sifra contains an interpretation of Lev 19:37 that supplies an addition to the base *ani YHWH*. Saa-diah adopts these modifications in his own translations of these verses.

All of these examples of Islamic influence on the *Tafsir* can reasonably be explained in light of Polliack's theory of cultural influence. Saadiah certainly would not have needed to rely on the Qur'an to be familiar with the Islamic practice of appending descriptive adjectives to the name of God or to understand the connotations of terms such as *rasūl*. Zucker's assertion that the gaon makes use of several less universally known Islamic terms and phrases may be a stronger indication that Saadiah was directly reliant on specifically Islamic sources, but not every similarity in word choice indicates borrowing. For example, Saadiah's *Tafsir* and the Qur'an both use the same words for manna, quail, and calf, but this is presumably because there is only one good Arabic word for each of these terms. Yet the particularly Islamic nature of some, if not all, of the parallels discussed above becomes more evident once one recognizes that Saadiah does indeed consciously borrow from Islamic sources in other instances. Evidence to support this assertion will be discussed below; first, however, we turn to another example of Islamic influence that can be attributed to Saadiah's cultural environment.

ISLAMIC LAW: TEMPORARY MARRIAGES

Saadiah frequently translates biblical passages to conform to rabbinic law, including his translation of the verses about boiling a kid in its mother's milk cited above. Zucker cites almost 350 examples of such translations (most not nearly as obvious), as well as forty-five instances in which the *Tafsir* contradicts *midrash halakhah*.[39] Among these latter cases is an intriguing verse in which Saadiah not only contradicts rabbinic law but also specifically rejects a practice debated within Islamic law. That practice is known as *mut'a*, which the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* defines as "literally, 'enjoyment,' used in Islamic law in the sense of temporary marriage (according to the Arab lexicographers 'marriage of pleasure'), a marriage which is contracted for a fixed period on rewarding the woman." The Qur'an itself may have permitted *mut'a* and the practice remains legal to this day among Shi'is, but by the 9th century CE the practice had been prohibited within Sunni circles. Mordechai Friedman cites

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[39] On verses that conform to rabbinic law, see Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, pp. 320–441; on verses that do not, see pp. 442–479.

sources indicating that, despite this prohibition, *mut'a* in all but name nevertheless continued to be practiced by Sunnis.[40]

Saadiah expresses his disapproval of *mut'a* by translating the biblical word *qadesh* (f. *qedeshah*), which JPS translates as "cult prostitute," as *mumta'* (f. *mumta'a*), one who enters into a temporary marriage. Thus, Deut 23:18 ("No Israelite woman shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any Israelite man be a cult prostitute") turns into a prohibition against *mut'a*. The term *qadesh* has been given a range of meanings by rabbinic interpreters—Onkelos translates it as "servant," Sifrei and Pseudo-Jonathan (along with Rashi and Rambam) as "harlot," R. Ishmael as "a partner in beastiality" (bSan 54b)—but Zucker cannot find any rabbinic support for Saadiah's interpretation. On the contrary, the Talmud seems explicitly to permit temporary marriage, and recounts that Babylonian rabbis of great stature engaged in the practice.[41]

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[40] W. Heffening, "Mut'a," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 7:757–759; M. A. Friedman, "Ha-Halakhah ke-'Edut le-Hayyei ha-Min eşel ha-Yehudim shebe-Arşot ha-Islam bi-Yemei ha-Beinayim: Kisui ha-Panim ve-Nisu'ei 'Mut'ah'," *Pe'amim* 45 (1990) 100, 103.

[41] Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, p. 478; see also Friedman, "Ha-Halakhah ke-'Edut," p. 102. bNed 29a and pQid 3.1 both require a *get* for women who were betrothed for limited times, and pQid 3.1 specifies that the *qiddushin* is valid. *Mut'a* marriages in Shi'i law do not require a bill of divorce, but Zucker and Friedman suggest that Saadiah must be prohibiting even a temporary marriage concluded by a *get*, because otherwise the objection to the marriage would be on the more serious grounds that the woman's subsequent "husbands" would effectively be committing adultery.

According to bYom 18b and bYeb 37b, "Rab, when he went to Dardeshir [according to Yoma: Darshish], called out, 'Who will be my [wife] for a day?' Also R. Nahman, when he went to Shekhanşib, called out, 'Who will be my [wife] for a day?'" The Babylonian Talmud in these passages prohibits the practice of marrying wives in multiple locations for fear that the children of the two wives might unknowingly marry one another, but considers it permissible for rabbis, because they are important enough individuals that the mothers would be sure to tell their children the nature of their paternity. (The question of whether a *get* is necessary does not seem to be an issue here.) Although the Talmud does prohibit temporary marriages among commoners, it does not do so on the same grounds as Saadiah does. It is noteworthy that both instances of temporary marriage occur in Sassanid Babylonia, as scholars of Islam have conjectured that *mut'a* marriage remained permissible in Shi'i Islam because it was an accepted practice in the Persian societies that came to form the backbone of Shi'ism; see B. Hjerrild, "Islamic Law and Sasanian Law," in *Law and the Islamic World Past and Present*, eds. C. Toll and J. Skovgaard-Petersen (Copenhagen, 1995), pp. 49–55.

Although Saadiah effectively creates an unprecedented biblical prohibition against temporary marriage, he considers it to be a lesser offense than other improper sexual relationships. The gaon explains the prohibition against *mut'a* in his *Commentary on Exodus*, 20:13.

> And the *Seventh Commandment*, "*Do not commit adultery*": In it there are seven senses [in ascending order of severity] because there are seven categories of people with whom illicit relationships are forbidden. The first is the *mut'a* marriage, because a woman who does this is called a *qedeshah* as you learn from the story of Tamar. And [the Torah] prohibits this, and says, "*No Israelite woman shall be a qedeshah, and no Israelite man shall be a qadesh*"; both men and women are prohibited [from engaging in such relationships]. . . . [42]

Saadiah's interpretation of the relationship between Judah and Tamar as a *mut'a* marriage is ingenious. The advantage of *mut'a* marriage over mere harlotry (to the extent that one recognizes a legal distinction between the two) is that the relationship is legitimate and therefore all offspring produced in that relationship are the legal heirs of the father. In the biblical account, Judah does in fact accept the legitimacy of his sons by Tamar, one of whom is the forebearer of King David. In the process of identifying Tamar as a woman interested in a temporary marriage, Saadiah also partially exonerates Judah, whom the Bible portrays as freely sleeping with harlots but whom the gaon considers to be guilty only of the least illicit form of improper sexual relationships. Saadiah asserts that the context of the encounter between Judah and Tamar proves that the word *qedeshah* means "one who is in a temporary marriage"; this practice is later expressly forbidden by Deut 23:18.

It is possible that Saadiah actually believed that the word *qedeshah* means *mumta'a* on the basis of its use in Genesis 38, but this strikes me as highly unlikely. In that chapter, the word *qedeshah* is used only by Judah's friend, describing the woman with whom Judah slept (Gen 38:21–22); Judah himself considers the woman to be a *zonah*, a harlot (Gen 38:15). Saadiah, however, uses the word *mumta'a* in all three of these verses, even though he translates the

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Hebrew root *z.n.h.* with its Arabic equivalent in Gen 38:24, when Tamar is accused of harlotry. Saadiah's "mistranslation" in Gen 38:15 masks the biblical evidence that contradicts his argument, but the gaon himself was surely aware of this contradiction. Furthermore, a plural form of the Hebrew, *qedeshim*, appears in Job 36:14, where Saadiah translates it as *majāna*, a word whose meaning is closely parallel to the JPS translation "depraved," and which has nothing to do with temporary marriage.[43] Nevertheless, Saadiah uses the opportunity afforded him as a translator and interpreter of the Torah to insert surreptitiously his own legal lesson about an Islamic practice into the biblical text.

Why did Saadiah bother to do so, and why did he take a position contrary to that expressed in the Talmud? Friedman suggests that Saadiah (like his Karaite counterparts who addressed the subject in other contexts) was trying to counter a real or perceived threat that Jews would take advantage of the Islamic practice of temporary marriage as a legalized form of harlotry, a practice which the Jewish leadership of the time considered to be an abomination.[44] The extent to which this threat was real is debatable: only under Shi'i law is there a distinction between *mut'a* and harlotry, and even in regions controlled by Shi'i regimes in the 9th and 10th centuries the vast majority of local government officials were Sunni (or, in Jewish communities, Jewish) and would therefore not have been sympathetic toward those who claimed that they were "temporarily married."[45] And as Friedman points out, Sunnis had found a way around their own prohibition of *mut'a*, which enterprising Jews could also have used. A more relevant issue in this context is that Friedman takes as a given the fact that Saadiah considered such marriages to be abominable. This appears to be the case, but why would the gaon

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[42] Zucker, *'Al Targum Rasag*, p. 478, and Friedman, "Ha-Halakhah ke-'Edut," pp. 100–101, both provide this text in its original along with a Hebrew translation. This English translation, based on the Judeo-Arabic, is my own. With the exception of the word *mut'a*, italics signify words that Saadiah wrote in Hebrew, not Arabic.

[43] See W. Bacher, ed., *Sefer Iyyov u-Seraho* (Paris, ca. 1899); this work is listed as Volume 5 of *Al-Tafāsir, al-Kutub, wal-Rasā'il*, although not all of the earlier volumes were published. According to Ch. Pellat, "Mudjūn," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 7:304, this word "can mean the most shameless debauchery, including vulgarity, coarseness, impudence, libertinage, obscenity and everything that may provoke coarse laughter, such as scatological humor." I am grateful to Phillip Kennedy of New York University for his assistance in tracking down the meaning of this word, which many classical lexica consider too improper to include.

[44] Friedman, "Ha-Halakhah ke-'Edut," p. 103.

[45] I am grateful to Richard Bulliet of Columbia University for his insights on this subject.

feel this way, especially in light of the Talmud's apparently non-chalant attitude toward the subject? I would suggest that Polliack's theory of cultural influence explains Saadiah's statements regarding *mutʿa*. Saadiah lived in an environment dominated by Sunni norms and therefore internalized the strong Sunni condemnation of the practice of temporary marriage. Whether Saadiah chose to address the issue of *mutʿa* in his *Tafsīr* because of concern regarding Jewish sexual activity, because he wanted to undermine a talmudic precedent he found distasteful, or simply because he wished to root his culturally derived opinion in biblical prooftexts, the manner in which he addresses the issue illustrates the culturally mediated influence not merely of Islam in general but Sunni Islam in particular on the gaon and on his biblical translation.

To this point, all of the examples of Islamic influence on Saadiah's *Tafsīr* of the Torah can be explained in light of Polliack's theory that the gaon was attentive to the language and culture with which his assimilated Jewish audience was familiar. There are a handful of instances, however, in which this theory does not adequately account for the apparent borrowing found in the *Tafsīr*. In some cases, Saadiah seems to rely directly on Islamic sources for specific pieces of information that he is unlikely to have learned simply by living in an Islamic environment, or that he is unlikely to have included in this translation simply because they were well known by his audience. We will begin with an apparent case of Saadiah's use of an Islamic tradition, and then proceed to several instances of apparent qurʾanic borrowing.

ISLAMIC TRADITION: THE ROAD TO SHUR

We have already encountered Saadiah's penchant for translating geographic locations in the Bible with or without rabbinic evidence for his cartographic decisions, a practice criticized by Ibn Ezra. Generally, however, the gaon is consistent in such translations, as he is in translating most biblical words; when Saadiah is inconsistent, such as in his translation of *zonah* as *mumtaʿa* in Gen 38:15, there is often an identifiable reason behind his decision. One particularly egregious example of creative and inconsistent cartography is Saadiah's translation of the place named Shur. According to Exod 15:22, Shur is the desert on the west side of the Sea of Reeds, in which the Children of Israel wandered for three days without water. Shur is

also mentioned in Gen 16:7, 20:1, and 25:18, in all three cases as a point of reference used in describing the location of another place. In Gen 16:7, the angel of God meets Hagar and announces the birth of Ishmael at a well on the road to Shur. Gen 20:1 states that Abraham went to Gerar, located between Kadesh and Shur, and Gen 25:18 reports that the children of Ishmael dwelt "from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Ashur." It seems reasonable, given these four verses, to place Shur within the Sinai peninsula near Egypt.[46] Both Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan consistently translate Shur as *hagra*, an Aramaic word related to the Arabic *hajr*, "rock."[47]

Saadiah translates the location Shur in no fewer than three different ways over the course of these four verses. In Exod 15:22, he translates the Hebrew *midbar shur* as *bariat shūr*, both of which simply mean "the desert of Shur." Saadiah renders Shur in Gen 20:1 and 25:8 as *al-jifār*. The Arabic geographer Yāqūt (d. 1229 CE) identifies several places named *al-jifār*, including a land associated with the Children of Israel that is a seven-day journey from Palestine toward Egypt, in which there is white sand and only bitter water.[48] This certainly seems to correspond with the presumed location of the biblical Shur, and it is unclear why Saadiah would not have translated Exod 15:22 as *al-jifār* as well. Most important in the present context, however, is Saadiah's translation of *shur* in Gen 16:7, which he renders as *hajr al-hijāz*. "The Rock of the Hijaz," a name derived at least in part from Onkelos' (and Pseudo-Jonathan's?) Aramaic translation of Shur as *hagra*, can be none other than the Black Rock of

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[46] This conclusion is further supported by the two remaining biblical references to the location named Shur, 1 Sam 15:7 and 27:8, both of which state that the place is close to Egypt.

[47] All citations of Onkelos in this work are taken from the edition prepared by J. Qafih and printed in *Torat Ḥayyim* (Jerusalem, 1986). It is possible that Onkelos selected this translation due to the fact that the word *shur* also means "wall." The Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906; repr., Peabody, Mass., 1997), s.v. *š.w.r.*, which offers this definition, also notes the possible connection between the place named Shur and a line of fortresses along the Suez. M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (1886–1890; repr., New York, 1996), s.v. *hagra*, notes that the word is used in tSheb 4.11 to refer to the town of Petra. Jastrow, somewhat unhelpfully, states that *hagra* as used by Onkelos is a place in the desert of Shur.

[48] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawi, *Muʿjam al-Buldān* (Beirut, 1955), s.v. *jifār*.

the Ka'bah in Mecca.[49] Saadiah's *Tafsīr* of Gen 16:7 thus ignores all biblical evidence that Shur is in the Sinai and reports that Hagar received the annunciation of the birth of Ishmael on the road to Mecca, the very location to which, according to Islamic tradition, Abraham took Ishmael and Hagar after Sarah sent them away and the place in which Abraham built the Ka'bah.[50]

There can be no doubt that the translation of *shur* as *hajr al-hijāz* must be due to the influence of Islamic traditions, as Jewish sources ascribe no significance whatsoever to the Hijaz region of Arabia. There are, however, enough manuscript variations regarding this phrase to warrant consideration of the question, did Saadiah really write the words *fī tarīq hajr al-hijāz*, "on the road of the Rock of the Hijaz"? Of the six manuscripts and editions containing Gen 16:7 which I have been able to compare, only the Derenbourg edition (based on the Constantinople edition) contains these specific words. The London Polyglot, which has numerous spelling mistakes due to its transcription from Hebrew script into Arabic script, contains the same phrase except that *hajr* is misspelled as *hajz* due to the orthographic similarity between the Arabic *r* and *z*. MS JTSA Lutzki 647, a 14th-century Yemenite text, omits the word *hajr* entirely, leaving *fī tarīq al-hijāz*, "on the road of the Hijaz."[51] The printed edition of the *Tāj*, the standard Yemenite text of the *Tafsīr*, contains no reference to Mecca as it omits the final word; the resulting phrase, *fī tarīq hajr*, conforms more closely to Onkelos' translation.[52] MS JTSA 5556, a 19th-century text from Jerusalem written

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[49] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *h.j.r.*, notes that *al-hajr* refers to the stone of the Ka'bah, while *al-hijr* means the sacred area encompassing the Ka'bah. According to Yāqūt, the rock of the Ka'bah itself is called *al-hijr* (Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān* s.v. *h.j.r.*). Since Saadiah's *Tafsīr* is unvocalized, either pronunciation is possible, but *al-hajr* seems more likely if Saadiah is indeed basing his interpretation on Onkelos' Aramaic. The Hijaz is the region of the Arabian Peninsula in which Mecca and Medina are located.

[50] For an analysis of Islamic versions of the Abraham-Ishmael myth, see R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, 1990); on the subject of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael and associated events in Mecca, see especially pp. 61–103.

[51] Actually, one can only say that the word is most likely to be *al-hijāz*; because the last letter of the word is unclear in the manuscript, another possible albeit nonsensical reading would be *al-hijāj*.

[52] *Sefer Keter Torah: Ha-Taj Ha-Gadol*, eds. J. A. Hasid and S. Sinai (Jerusalem, 1960), Gen 16:7.

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in Yemenite handwriting, seems to base itself on the source for the printed *Tāj* but renders *tarīq hajr* as *tarīq hagar*, "the road of Hagar."[53] The Yemenite manuscript which Derenbourg himself consulted in the preparation of his edition replaces the problematic phrase entirely with the words *fī tarīq al-jifār*, bringing Gen 16:7 into conformity with Gen 20:1 and 25:18.

Unfortunately, Saadiah's own commentary on this verse is silent on the matter at hand,[54] so there is no way of proving definitively what Saadiah intended without access to the earliest manuscripts of the *Tafsīr*. It is reasonable, however, to conclude on the basis of the information surveyed above that the Derenbourg-Constantinople version is the most accurate. One can consider the Polyglot, MS 647, and *Tāj* variants, as well as the manuscript variant cited by Derenbourg, as being conscious or accidental modifications of the phrase *fī tarīq hajr al-hijāz*; hypothesizing that the *Tāj* text best reflects the original, one can only account directly for the Derenbourg-Constantinople and MS 5556 variants.[55] Furthermore, it seems much more likely that Judeo-Arabic copyists would endeavor to remove an obvious Islamic reference rather than to include one that had not existed in the original. Still more support for the argument that Saadiah himself chose to refer to the Hijaz region in his *Tafsīr* can be found in his rendering of Gen 10:30 (a verse without complicating textual variants), in which he translates the locations Mesha and Sephar as Mecca and Medina, respectively; Saadiah was clearly not

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[53] Both the Hasid/Sinai edition of the *Tāj* and MS JTSA 5556 employ a particular Judeo-Arabic orthography in which the Arabic letter *jīm* is rendered as a *gimmel* without a diacritical mark; in the more widespread Judeo-Arabic orthography, a *gimmel* without a diacritical mark would represent the Arabic letter *ghayn*. If the source for the *tarīq hagar* variant relied on an earlier text of the *Tāj* that also used this particular orthography, then the variant can be explained simply as the result of a shift between the orthographically similar Hebrew letters *het* and *heh*. (Most personal names in the *Tafsīr* are rendered in Hebrew, not Arabic; consequently, Hagar's name should not be read either as *hajar* or *haghar*.) On the use of diacritical marks in Judeo-Arabic, see J. Blau, *Diqduq ha-'Aravit-ha-Yehudit* (Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 46–47.

[54] See Zucker, ed., *Perushei Rav Se'adiah*, 16:7. Saadiah addresses such issues as the status of Hagar and the nature of her conversation with the angel, but not the location of this encounter.

[55] Derenbourg's Yemenite manuscript variant (*fī tarīq al-jifār*) can best be explained as a conscious alteration by a copyist interested in removing a problematic original text. If so, it is more likely based on a manuscript containing a clear Islamic reference rather than one that merely mimics Onkelos.

averse to including references to Islamic sites in the *Tafsīr*. And
Saadiah is not the only rabbinic figure to associate Hagar's flight
with Mecca: Ibn Ezra, who frequently relies on Saadiah's interpre-
tations but does not indicate such reliance in this instance, identifies
the spring at which the angel meets Hagar as being associated with
the Islamic pilgrimage.[56] Ibn Ezra's interpretation (which does not
account for the geographic incongruity of Hagar being at a spring
outside Mecca while on the road to the Sinai) does not directly con-
tradict the biblical text; Saadiah, in contrast, is apparently willing to
set aside the evident meaning of Gen 16:7 in favor of a tradition
drawn from Islam.

Why is the gaon willing to do so? Polliack's theory that Saadiah
was influenced by his Islamic cultural environment does not account
for his willingness to make this alteration, even if one argues that
Saadiah became exposed to the Islamic tradition of Hagar going to
Mecca because that tradition had become a part of popular culture.
Saadiah was surely exposed to numerous Islamic traditions to which
he does not refer in the *Tafsīr*. Since Saadiah himself offers no ex-
planation for this translation, however, we will have to decipher his
motivations in light of other passages from the *Tafsīr* that show evi-
dence of borrowing from Islamic texts and traditions. Therefore, in-
stead of offering an answer to this important question now, we turn
instead to the first of three occasions in which Saadiah appears to
modify biblical texts on the basis of parallel passages in the Qur'an.

QUR'ANIC PARALLEL I: BECOMING LIKE ANGELS

Translators have long had difficulty with Gen 3:5. The snake, ex-
plaining to the woman later called Eve why God does not want her
and her husband to eat from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the
garden, states that as a result of eating the fruit their eyes will be
opened *wi-hyitem ke-elohim yod'ei tov wa-ra'*. JPS translates the

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[56] Ibn Ezra, commenting on the name Hagar gives the spring in Gen 16:14, *be'er
lahai ro'i*, states that "every year the Ishmaelites celebrate at this well, and to this
day the well is called *zamum* (according to the Paris manuscript noted in the foot-
notes of the Weiser edition: *zamzav*)." Ibn Ezra is presumably referring here to the
well called Zamzam, located just outside Mecca and associated with the annual *hajj*
ritual. According to Islamic tradition, this spring was discovered with angelic assis-
tance by Hagar and Ishmael in their thirst after having been abandoned by Abraham;
see Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, pp. 63–71.

concluding phrase of Gen 3:5 as "you will be like divine beings who
know good and bad" with a note, "Others '[you will be like] God,
who knows.'" The beginning of Gen 6:2, *wa-yir'u benei ha-elohim
et benot ha-adam ki tovot hennah*, offers similar difficulties; JPS
renders this portion of the verse as "the divine beings saw how
beautiful the daughters of men were" and offers the note, "Others
'the sons of God.'" The trouble with both Gen 3:5 and 6:2 is the
word *elohim*, which most often means "God," as it does at the begin-
ning of Gen 3:5 itself, which JPS renders as "but God knows that as
soon as you eat of it [the fruit] your eyes will be opened. . . ." The
word can also mean "gods" in a polytheistic sense, as in Exod 20:3
("You shall have no other gods besides Me"), or, according to the
rabbis, a human "judge," as in Exod 21:6. None of these meanings,
however, would have been acceptable to Saadiah or his rabbinic
predecessors in the context of Gen 3:5; the first two options would
be rejected on theological grounds—humans cannot become like
either God or gods!—while the third possibility is simply illogical.

Gen 3:5 is quoted infrequently in talmudic and early midrashic
literature, so it is difficult to determine exactly how Saadiah's rab-
binic predecessors understood it. When cited, the relevant portion of
Gen 3:5 is used as an example of a biblical passage in which *elohim*
does not refer to God (Soferim 4.4, NumR 14.12), but neither rab-
binic text offers a better translation for the biblical word. The refer-
ence to *benei ha-elohim* in Gen 6:2, however, is subject to a clear
rabbinic re-interpretation: "R. Shimon b. Yoḥai reads it as 'sons of
judges' (*benei dayyanaya*); R. Shimon b. Yoḥai would curse anyone
who read it as 'sons of gods' (*benei elahaya*)" (GenR 26.5). This
interpretation seems to be the standard rabbinic manner of under-
standing Gen 6:2, and appears without comment in paraphrases of
this verse in other rabbinic works.[57] Onkelos relies on a similar
interpretation, translating *elohim* in both 3:5 and 6:2 as *ravrevin*,
"great men." This understanding of the word is also reflected in
the fragment of a pre-Saadianic Arabic translation of the Torah

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[57] See, for example, Sifre, *Beha'alotekha* 86. The sharp rabbinic reaction to a lit-
eral interpretation of the account in Genesis 6 may well be a response to Jewish mys-
tical and apocalyptic traditions that identify the *benei ha-elohim* with fallen angels (see
1 Enoch 6 and following). If so, it is noteworthy that the reaction is attributed to Shi-
mon b. Yoḥai, traditionally portrayed as a rather mystical figure himself.

published by Yosef Tobi, which renders the conclusion of 3:5 as *wa-takūnū ka'l-ashr[āf] 'ārifī al-khair wa-[l-sharr]*.[58]

Saadiah himself follows Onkelos' lead in translating Gen 6:2, which he renders *ra'aw banū al-ashrāf banāt al-'āmma*, "the sons of the nobles saw the daughters of the commoners."[59] Yet Saadiah offers a different interpretation of the word *elohim* in his translation of Gen 3:5, the conclusion of which he renders *wa-taṣirān ka'l-malā'ika 'ārifīn al-khayr wa'l-sharr*, "and you will become like angels, knowing good and evil."[60] Saadiah thus deviates from Onkelos' translation of *elohim* as great men, even though he accepts that interpretation elsewhere. Saadiah's reading of this verse has no talmudic parallels,[61] nor does he appear to be borrowing from

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[58] Tobi, "Seridei Targum 'Aravi," p. 119.

[59] See also Gen 33:10, in which *elohim* refers to Esau; Onkelos translates the word as *ravrevin* and Saadiah renders it *al-ashrāf.* Saadiah offers a different translation of *benei ha-elohim* in Job 1:6 and 2:1, concerned primarily with the word "sons" rather than "God." There, he renders the phrase as *awliyā' allāh*, "close associates of God," explaining that the connotation of "sons" here is similar to that found in Deut 14:1 ("You are children of the Lord your God"), Exod 4:22 ("Israel is My first-born son"), and Deut 32:5 (*lo' banav mumam*; JPS offers an interpretive translation of this difficult verse), none of which are to be understood literally. See Bacher, ed., *Sefer Iyyov u-Seraho*, 1:6. Saadiah uses the word *awliyā'* in his translations of the Deuteronomy passages, and modifies Exod 4:22 so as to make clear that God's statement regarding Israel's ancestry is meant to express the honor of Israel.

[60] This according to the Constantinople edition as printed by Derenbourg. While all manuscripts and editions of the *Tafsīr* that I consulted agree that the word *elohim* is translated as *malā'ika*, there is some discrepancy over the translation of the preceding verb. Derenbourg and the London Polyglot both render the verb *taṣirān*, the dual form of "to become," while two Yemenite manuscripts in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary (Lutzki 647 and JTSA 5556) contain the plural form, *taṣirū.* The *Tāj* (eds. Hasid and Sinai) contains the phrase *wa-takūnū ka'l-malā'ika*, "and you (plural, not dual) will be like angels." Zucker, in his discussion of manuscript variants of this verse (*'Al Targum Rasag*, pp. 295–296), notes that Lagarde's edition of the text of Genesis and Exodus replaces *ka'l-malā'ika* with *ka'l-alāha*; Zucker rejects this variant on the grounds that Saadiah only uses the words *allāh* and *rabb* to refer to the name of God. Zucker does not address the possibility that Saadiah's use of the word *malā'ika* in this context derives from Islamic influence. He is much more interested in the possibility (which he accepts) that Saadiah appends the word *bi-zi'āda* to the end of this verse in order to indicate that eating the fruit would make Adam and Eve *more* knowledgeable of good and evil; in his *Commentary* on this verse Saadiah insists that they possessed knowledge prior to eating.

[61] There is one instance in the Talmud in which the biblical word *elohim* is understood to mean angel. It occurs, however, in a different context, namely an interpretation of Gen 32:29, *ki sarita 'im elohim*, which is rendered "Jacob became a master to

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the Jewish mystical tradition which equates the *benei ha-elohim* in Gen 6:2 with fallen angels (see 1 Enoch 6 and following), because in that context Saadiah is careful to utilize Onkelos' interpretation of the text. The association between eating from the tree and becoming like angels—which does not appear in talmudic, midrashic, or early Jewish mystical texts—is found instead in Qur'an 7:20, in which Satan asserts that, by eating from the tree, *takūnā malakayn aw takūnā min al-khālidīn*, "you will be angels or you will be among the immortal."[62]

Is Saadiah's translation of Gen 3:5 an adoption of the qur'anic understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden? This seems to be a reasonable possibility, but there are other explanations that must be considered. Saadiah may have borrowed the translation of *elohim* as angels from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, a 7th- or 8th-century Aramaic translation of the Torah (also known as the Jerusalem Targum) that, according to some modern scholars, influenced Saadiah's *Tafsīr*.[63] Although Pseudo-Jonathan's translation of Gen 6:2 parallels Onkelos (*benei ravrevaya*, sons of great men), the later Targum renders the relevant portion of Gen 3:5 as "*wa-tehewon ka-malakhin ravrevin*," "and you will be as great angels." Pseudo-Jonathan's version of this phrase effectively combines the text found in the earlier Targum Onkelos and the later *Tafsīr* of Saadiah, with the word

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the angel" (bHul 92a). Saadiah translates the word *elohim* in that verse to mean God, not an angel.

[62] The myth of the tree also appears in Qur'an 2:35–36, 20:120, but without direct reference to angels. According to 20:120, Satan entices Adam to eat from the Tree of Immortality (*shajarat al-khuld*). 2:35–36 contains no reference to the promised outcome of eating the fruit of the tree. Both of these passages, however, come in the context of myths about angels: 2:30–33 recounts the angelic opposition to the creation of Adam, while both 2:34 and 20:116 tell of God's command to the angels to bow before Adam and Iblīs' refusal to do so. Islamic tradition identifies Iblīs as Satan.

[63] The editors of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* note that Saadiah's translation of biblical names is in keeping with Pseudo-Jonathan; see "Saadiah Gaon: Saadiah's Translation of the Bible," *EJ* 14:553. Derenbourg compares Saadiah's translation with Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on several occasions, including Num 16:3, 18:16. Although Derenbourg does not note comparisons with this translation anywhere in the book of Genesis, it is possible that Saadiah knew Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis and that it influenced his own work. Several scholars have lamented the numerous deficiencies of Derenbourg's edition; another of these deficiencies may be his inconsistency in comparing Saadiah with Pseudo-Jonathan.

ravrevin serving as an adjective describing the angels rather than a substantive implicitly referring to human beings. It is possible that Saadiah followed Pseudo-Jonathan's translation instead of Onkelos' version (and omitted mention of the greatness of the angels) without being influenced at all by the Islamic understanding of the tree. Conversely, however, one cannot discount the possibility that Pseudo-Jonathan himself was influenced by Islamic thought in his rendering of this verse. There are instances in Pseudo-Jonathan's translation in which such influence is indisputable, including his rendering of Gen 21:21, in which Ishmael's wives are listed as "Fatima" and either "ʿIsha" or "Adisha," all relatives of Muhammad.[64]

The possibilities for the transmission to Saadiah of the tradition that *elohim* means angels in the context of Gen 3:5 are thus as follows: (1) Saadiah could have borrowed the translation from the Qurʾan or another specifically Islamic source, with or without knowledge of Pseudo-Jonathan's translation; (2) Saadiah, without consideration of the Islamic tradition, could have borrowed from Pseudo-Jonathan, who himself borrowed from Islamic sources; (3) Saadiah, without consideration of the Islamic tradition, could have borrowed from Pseudo-Jonathan, who borrowed from the same pre-Islamic source that influenced the Qurʾan; (4) Saadiah could have borrowed from the original pre-Islamic source without consideration of the Islamic tradition and without knowledge of Pseudo-Jonathan's Targum of Genesis; or (5) Saadiah could have been influenced by his Islamic cultural environment, in which the tradition that consuming the fruit would cause humans to become like angels was widely known.

The second and third options seem improbable. Given the extensive influence of Onkelos' translation on Saadiah's *Tafsīr*, it seems unlikely that Saadiah would take from Pseudo-Jonathan only that element of the translation which is absent from Onkelos. The fourth option is possible, and indeed, one could argue that almost every

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[64] Z. Gottlieb, "Targum Yonatan ben ʿUziel ʿal ha-Torah," *Melilah* 1 (1944) 34. ʿĀʾisha and Khadīja were wives of Muhammad, and Fātima was the Prophet's daughter. According to *Pseudo-Jonathan*, ed. M. Ginsburger (Hildesheim, 1971), a critical edition of the text based on MS BM 27031, the names listed are *ʿIsha* and *Fatima*; Ginsburger includes a note stating that some manuscripts read *Adisha* instead of *ʿIsha*. *Targum Yonatan ben ʿUziel ʿal ha-Torah*, ed. D. Rieder (Jerusalem, 1974), another critical edition based on the same manuscript, provides a different reading: Ishmael's wives are *Adisha* and *Fatima*, although some manuscripts read *ʿIsha* instead of *Adisha*.

parallel between the *Tafsīr* and Islamic tradition is due to borrowing from a shared pre-Islamic source, but one would be hard pressed to prove that Saadiah had access to numerous 6th- and 7th-century traditions that were preserved independently of Islamic sources into the 10th century but have subsequently disappeared. The last option is also possible, but relies on the presumption that this particular tradition had become part of the widespread cultural understanding of the Garden of Eden myth, much as contemporary westerners commonly consider the fruit of the tree to be an apple. This presumption is difficult if not impossible to prove, and it strikes me as improbable that the specific notion of Adam and Even becoming like angels would have gained universal cultural coinage to the extent that, for this reason alone, Saadiah considered it worthy of inclusion in his *Tafsīr*.[65] The possibility of cultural influence cannot be fully discounted as an explanation for Saadiah's translation, and it is in fact strengthened somewhat by the fact that the Karaite translations of Yefet and Yeshuʿah (which generally refrain from using Islamic terms and sources) also render Gen 3:5 using the word *malāʾika*, yet it is also possible that these Karaite translators borrowed this translation directly from Saadiah and not from their cultural environment.[66] The first option thus remains a distinct possibility: Saadiah, regardless of whether he knew Pseudo-Jonathan or whether this particular tradition had entered popular culture, decided to translate Gen 3:5 as referring to angels and not great men on the basis of his knowledge of the Qurʾan or Islamic traditions based on it. This assertion of specifically qurʾanic influence on the *Tafsīr*, tentative on its own, is supported by Saadiah's unambiguous reliance on qurʾanic material elsewhere, as detailed below.

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[65] It should be noted that this explanation cannot account for Pseudo-Jonathan's translation, since Islam had not yet come to permeate the culture of Palestine in the 7th or 8th centuries. The only options available to explain Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 3:5 are to posit borrowing from Islam (as he clearly did in identifying the supposed wives of Ishmael) or Pseudo-Jonathan's use of a pre-Islamic source that independently influenced the Qurʾan.

[66] Blau, "Some Instances," pp. 21–28, attributes numerous similarities between the *Tafsīr* and Karaite texts to borrowing from Saadiah's translation. Polliack notes the predilection of Yefet and Yeshuʿah toward de-anthropomorphizing God by means of reference to an angel, *The Karaite Tradition*, p. 89. Polliack briefly discusses Gen 3:5 as an example of how translators replace the original meaning of a biblical word so as to avoid an anthropomorphic reference to God (p. 178); she does not address the question of why all three translators make the same replacement.

Even if one is not willing to accept the attribution of Saadiah's translation of Gen 3:5 to the specific influence of the Qur'an, there is enough evidence to suggest the high likelihood of this translation being based on Islamic influence of some sort. The tradition that associates *elohim* with angels in this verse cannot be found before the rise of Islam, nor does it appear in a pre-Saadianic Arabic translation of the verse; Pseudo-Jonathan, Saadiah, and the Karaites, who all offer a translation of Gen 3:5 using the word for "angels," are all known to have been influenced in various ways by Islam. The implication of this attribution, however, is that Saadiah consciously chose to follow the Islamic interpretation of events in the Garden of Eden even though Onkelos offered a reasonable alternative. We are again faced with the question of why Saadiah does so, and again Saadiah's *Commentary* on this verse does not offer any guidance.[67]

QUR'ANIC PARALLEL II: JOSEPH'S GARMENT

We have now encountered the instances in which Saadiah elects to follow Islamic traditions over rabbinic interpretations (*elohim*, Gen 3:5) or over a straightforward reading of the biblical text (*shur*, Gen 16:7). Before addressing the crucial question of why Saadiah does this, one more instance of Islamic influence on the gaon's translation of the Book of Genesis is in order. This example was first noted at the beginning of the 20th century and debated in the pages of the *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Adolf Schmiedl points out that, although in the rest of his *Tafsīr* Saadiah translates the Hebrew word *beged* with the Arabic *thawb* (both of which mean "garment"), in the passage recounting Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39 he repeatedly translates the word as *qamīṣ*, "shirt."[68] Schmiedl explains the anomaly by

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[67] Zucker, ed., *Perushei Rav Seʿadiah*, 3:5; see above, n. 60.

[68] A. Schmiedl, "Randbemerkungen zu Saadja's Pentateuchübersetzung," *MGWJ* 45 (1901) 127–129. This is the first of three related articles on the subject, published under the same title in different issues of the *Monatsschrift* from 1901–1902. Schmiedl is not quite accurate in his statement that, aside from Genesis 39, Saadiah always translates *beged* as *thawb*. There is one other instance in which Saadiah does not translate *beged* as *thawb*; this exception, however, proves the rule. Saadiah translates the command to attach fringes ʿ*al kanfei bigdehem*, "on the corners of their garments" (Num 15:38), to apply only to *uzurhum*, their shawls or outer garments. This translation, which Zucker does not discuss, is clearly intended to express Saadiah's understanding

showing the parallel with Qur'an 12, the chapter about Joseph, in which the word *qamīṣ* is used for the garment Joseph's brothers bring back to their father to prove his death (12:18), the garment which Joseph's would-be seducer ripped from behind (12:25–28), and the garment which Joseph sends back with his brothers to Jacob to prove that he is still alive (12:93).[69] Schmiedl concludes that the use of the word *qamīṣ* in Genesis 39 is due to Islamic influence and that Saadiah could not possibly have inserted this word himself, both because Saadiah would not include references to the Qur'an in a translation of the Torah and because if he was indeed alluding to *Sūrat Yūsuf* he would have availed himself of additional opportunities to include parallel language.

In a subsequent issue of the *Monatsschrift*, Wilhelm Bacher rejects Schmiedl's assertion that Saadiah would not have made references to the Qur'an in his *Tafsīr*. Bacher cites as proof Saadiah's translation of the first phrase in Ps 18:32, rendered by JPS as "who is a god except the Lord," which Saadiah renders *lā ilāh illā allāh*, the traditional Islamic formula expressing God's unity.[70] Bacher proceeds to explain the irregular use of the Arabic *qamīṣ* for the Hebrew *beged* in the Joseph narrative by citing Ibn Ezra's commentary on Gen 2:11 (see above, p. 358) as proof that Saadiah was writing for an Islamic audience. As a result, Saadiah would naturally wish to include references to the Qur'an in his translation, particularly in his rendition of the Joseph narrative which, according to the Qur'an, is *aḥsān al-qaṣaṣ*, "the fairest of stories."[71] Bacher's argument,

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of the commandment regarding *ṣiṣit*, and for this reason Saadiah strays from a literal translation of *thawb*. Without good reason to do so, however, Saadiah remains consistent in his translation.

[69] It should be noted that Saadiah only uses the word *qamīṣ* in conjunction with the second of these passages. For the special tunic Jacob gives Joseph in Gen 37:3 (Hebrew: *ketonet passim*), Saadiah translates *tūnia dibāj*, or, in the London Polyglot, *jabba dibāj*; the latter version means "adorned coat." (For the meaning of *tūnia dibāj*, see below, n. 73.) In the biblical account of the Joseph narrative, Joseph does not send a garment back to his father to prove that he is still alive.

[70] Bacher here cites his own earlier work, *Abraham Ibn Esra's Einleitung zu seinem Pentateuch-Commentar* (Vienna, 1876), p. 34, which contains additional references to Islamic terms used in Saadiah's translation of Psalms and other works, including the terms *imām* and *rasūl* discussed above, pp. 361–365.

[71] W. Bacher, "Notizen," pp. 565–566. The phrase *aḥsān al-qaṣaṣ* comes from Qur'an 12:3.

however, is untenable in light of the recent scholarly arguments, mentioned above, that Saadiah did in fact write his *Tafsīr* in Judeo-Arabic for a Jewish audience and not an Islamic one.

Another difficulty with Bacher's explanation is that it fails to address Schmiedl's second argument: if indeed Saadiah consciously includes qur'anic references for the benefit of Islamic readers, why does he fail to include even more references to the *sūra* about Joseph? As Schmiedl notes, Saadiah could have rendered the phrase in Gen 37:25, *orḥat yishma'elim*, "a caravan of Ishmaelites," using the word *sayyāra*, following Qur'an 12:19 and in consonance with Onkelos' Aramaic translation (*sheyarat 'arba'ei*). Instead, Saadiah translates the word for caravan as *qāfila* (the two Arabic words are synonyms), and misses an easy opportunity to allude to the qur'anic version of the story.[72] Similarly, Saadiah could have referred to the tunic Jacob gave Joseph in Genesis 37 as a *qamīṣ* to strengthen his qur'anic allusion, but instead calls it a *tūnia*.[73] Such "missed oppor-

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[72] Schmiedl, "Randbemerkungen" (1901), p. 128.

[73] The word *tūnia*, which Saadiah consistently employs as a translation of the Hebrew *ketonet*, does not exist in classical Arabic dictionaries, according to Y. Avishur, "'Millim Qashot' be-Targum Rasag la-Torah ve-Gilguleihen be-Nusha'ot ha-Targumim ba-Mizrah," *Mesorot* 3–4 (1989) 140–142. This word is indeed missing from Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* and other dictionaries of classical Arabic, as well as from R. Dozy, *Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les arabes* (1845; repr., Beirut, n.d.), where a reference might have been expected. It does, however, appear in R. Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes* (1881; repr., Beirut, 1968), a work based primarily on modern and early modern Moroccan sources, and in H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. M. Cowan (1974; repr., Beirut, 1980), a work heavily reliant on Egyptian sources. Both dictionaries offer the same definition for the word *tūnia*, which Wehr renders as "alb of priests and deacons." An alb is a special white linen robe worn by priests in the celebration of the Mass.

Saadiah's use of the term *tūnia dibāj* may be an example of Christian influence on Saadiah's thought in general and on the *Tafsīr* in particular, although I make no claims to have examined this subject in any depth. Another possible Christian influence on the *Tafsīr* is the term Saadiah uses to express God's physical presence without resorting to anthropomorphism; Saadiah's phrase of choice, *nūr allāh* (see above, n. 9), may be related to the Christian practice of referring to Christ as *al-nūr* (see Wehr, *A Dictionary*, s.v. *nūr*). Further examination of these and other potential parallels may prove instructive. It would not, however, affect the strength of the present thesis that Saadiah utilized Islamic sources in his translational work, as the possibility of one type of influence does not exclude the possibility of another also existing. If anything, evidence that Saadiah relied on Christian as well as Islamic sources would strengthen the possibility, insufficiently supported by this study, that Saadiah was open to incorporating into his work information he considered to be valuable regardless of his opinion of

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tunities" abound in Saadiah's translation. To cite only a few examples, Saadiah uses a different word than the Qur'an for Noah's ark (*tābūt* instead of *fulk*)[74] and fails to use any parallel language in his version of the Abraham and Sarah narrative or in the story of Moses' birth. Although Saadiah could easily have used the same word as the Qur'an (*al-ḥajr*) to identify the two rocks which Moses strikes in the desert (Exod 17:6, Num 20:7, cf. Qur'an 2:60, 7:160), he chooses instead to use more specific Arabic words (*al-ṣawān, al-ṣakhr*) to better reflect the biblical Hebrew.[75] Nor does Saadiah adopt the Islamic interpretations of verses said to foretell the coming of Muhammad. Camilla Adang lists eight passages from the Torah considered by Islamic polemicists to foretell the coming of Muhammad; with the exception of Saadiah's translation of the place-name *shur*, there is nothing in Saadiah's translations of these passages that would provide any support for these claims.[76] For each example of Islamic borrowing in the *Tafsīr*, there are countless potential borrowings that do not occur. It is therefore impossible to

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the religion from which it originated; whatever Saadiah's attitude toward Islam, his perception of Christianity was certainly a negative one. On the subject of Saadiah's attitude toward these religions, see the articles cited above, n. 21, as well as D. J. Lasker, "Saadya Gaon on Christianity and Islam," *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden, 1995), pp. 165–177; E. Schlossberg, "Neged Mi Mitpalmes Rav Se'adiyah Gaon be-Diyyuno be-Bitul ha-Torah? Teshuvah le-Ma'amaro shel Prof. Lasker," *Da'at* 32–33 (1994) 13–17.

[74] The Arabic word *tābūt* is related to the Hebrew word *tevah* used in Genesis to refer to Noah's ark; both literally mean "chest" or "box." The proper Arabic word for a ship or ark is *fulk* and appears in Quran 7:64; an alternative is *safīna*, used by such figures as Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) and al-Ya'qūbī (d. 897), both of whom make extensive use of biblical materials. (I am grateful to Camilla Adang for bringing these references to my attention.) Saadiah, using a cognate word, conforms to the literal meaning of the biblical Hebrew rather than offering a more interpretive translation that would have matched Islamic tradition; on Saadiah's use of cognate words in his translation, see above, n. 22.

[75] The Hebrew word for "rock" in Exod 17:6 is *ṣur* (boulder), while in Num 20:7 the word is *sela'* (cliff). Saadiah is consistent throughout his *Tafsīr* in translating the Hebrew *even* (rock) with the Arabic *al-ḥajr* and the word *ṣur* with *al-ṣawwān*; in one poetic reference (Deut 32:13), he translates *sela'* as *al-ḥajr*, but otherwise that word is translated consistently as *al-ṣakhr*. Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*, relying on the 11th-century Iraqi lexicographer al-Jawharī, translates *ṣawwān* as flintstone or hard stone and *ṣakhr* as "great masses of hard stone."

[76] C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden, 1996), p. 264.

conclude that, on the occasions when Saadiah does rely on Islamic sources, he does so for the express purpose of creating parallels between his work and Islamic texts and traditions. Why, then, does Saadiah insert Islamic references into his *Tafsīr* at all?

Polliack's hypothesis regarding the influence of Saadiah's Islamic cultural environment on his translation is unable to account for instances in which the *Tafsīr* adopts specific and selected elements from Islamic texts or traditions. According to popular Islamic belief, Hagar was not only on the road to Mecca, she actually went there, along with Abraham and Ishmael. The fact that Saadiah lived in an Islamic society, and was therefore presumably aware of this version of the story, does not account for why he incorporates it in any form into the *Tafsīr* or why he does so only to the limited extent of saying that Hagar was traveling toward Mecca. A similar point can be made regarding his rendering of the Garden of Eden myth: the gaon does not incorporate the most important aspect of the qur'anic version—that the tempter was Iblīs, a fallen angel traditionally associated with the devil—but he does incorporate the apparently minor detail that the fruit of the tree causes one to become like the angels. One can also question whether the Islamic details which the gaon incorporates into his translation were in fact widely known in Arabic culture. Could Saadiah have expected his readers to know that the fruit of the tree causes one to become like the angels? It is quite possible that the story of Joseph's seducer ripping his garment from behind was well known, but was the fact that this garment was a shirt so commonly accepted that Saadiah felt compelled to offer a non-literal translation to conform to cultural expectations? Polliack's hypothesis is valuable, but insufficient; a supplementary hypothesis is needed.

I would suggest that Saadiah considers Islamic sources to contain accurate information and insights regarding biblical history. The Bible merely refers to Joseph's clothing in Genesis 39 as a "garment," but the Qur'an specifies that the garment is in fact a shirt. Saadiah, accepting the veracity of the qur'anic account, therefore translates the general Hebrew word *beged* with the specific Arabic word *qamīs*. Similarly, the biblical account of Hagar's flight from Sarah states that the angel found her on the road to Shur, but does not mention her intended destination. Relying on the Islamic tradition that Hagar went to Mecca, Saadiah inserts *ḥajr al-ḥijāz* as the intended final destination of her journey instead of Shur, which

would merely be a landmark along the way. The Torah merely states that Moses is a *nabī*, a prophet; the gaon, where appropriate, sharpens this description by using the more specific word for an elite, Scripture-bearing messenger, *rasūl*. In the passage about the fruit of the tree, Saadiah uses the Qur'an not to provide a more specific description of a biblical event but rather to clarify an ambiguous biblical passage which could not be interpreted literally; evidently, Saadiah considers the Qur'an's clarification to be preferable for whatever reason to that of Onkelos in this case. Saadiah does not, however, use qur'anic language when the Bible is clear and specific. For this reason, Joseph's tunic in Genesis 37 remains a *tūnia* even though Qur'an 12:18 states that it is a *qamīs*, and the rocks which Moses strikes are called by their specific names and not the generic, qur'anic *ḥajr*.

In certain cases Saadiah is clearly willing to adopt Islamic understandings of the biblical text over those of respected rabbinic interpreters, and indeed over the evident meaning of the text itself; otherwise, there would be no reference to angels in Saadiah's version of Gen 3:5 and no reference to the Hijaz in Gen 16:7. Saadiah trusted and relied directly upon Islamic texts and traditions in order to interpret certain imprecise or problematic biblical passages, interpretations which cannot be explained simply by reference to Saadiah's sensitivity to his cultural environment. This is the most plausible way to understand the qur'anic and traditional parallels which we have examined so far, and also helps to explain Saadiah's use of certain Islamic terms and concepts. It is also the only way, in my opinion, to account for the next and final example of Islamic influence on Saadiah's *Tafsīr*.

QUR'ANIC PARALLEL III: THE COLOR OF THE COW

The Book of Numbers contains another instance in which the gaon appears to rely on the Qur'an for authentic information about a biblical narrative. This case, however, is more complicated than those from Genesis which we have already encountered because of the nature of the language that Saadiah borrows. The relevant passage is Qur'an 2:64–71, which describes what happened when God, through Moses, commands the Children of Israel to sacrifice a cow. The people, doubting Moses' message, repeatedly demand that the prophet ask God to clarify what sort of cow should be sacrificed.

Moses reports that the cow should be middle-aged, a pleasing color of yellow, and be both unblemished and never used for labor. Of most interest in the present context is the second of Moses' three answers, contained in the latter portion of 2:69: *qāla innahu yaqūlu innahā baqara ṣafrāʾ fāqiʿ lawnuhā tasurru al-nāẓirīn*, "He [Moses] said, 'He [God] says that she is a yellow cow, her color is free from admixture, those who see her are gladdened.'" Satisfied by Moses' answers, the people sacrifice the appropriate cow. This narrative is immediately followed by two enigmatic verses relating to the murder of an Israelite in which the sacrificed cow appears to play some role in either resurrecting the deceased or identifying his murderer.

Although there are substantial differences, this qurʾanic story seems to be related to the biblical command to sacrifice an unblemished and unworked red heifer whose ashes are used to purify those who have become ritually impure through contact with corpses (Numbers 19). The key verse of interest here is Num 19:2, the second portion of which is translated by JPS as "Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow (*parah adumah*) without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid." Saadiah translates this verse almost the same way, and most modern scholars have failed to note anything unusual about the *Tafsīr*'s interpretation of the verse. There is, however, one significant departure from the biblical text: according to every manuscript and edition of the *Tafsīr* which I have been able to examine, the color of the cow is *ṣafrāʾ*, the qurʾanic word describing the cow's color.[77] It appears that Saadiah considers the red heifer to be yellow.

There can be no explanation for Saadiah's use of the word *ṣafra*ʾ in this particular context other than that he is reliant on Qurʾan 2:69, as there are no rabbinic sources which suggest that the cow was anything but red. But why would Saadiah contradict the unambiguous meaning of the biblical text, not to mention the entire rabbinic tradition of interpreting this verse, in favor of the Qurʾan's understanding of the cow's color? Saadiah borrows no other elements of this quranic narrative, and even uses different vocabulary to translate the command that the cow be unblemished and not have been forced to work; as we have seen elsewhere, Saadiah is not merely incorporat-

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[77] I exaggerate here slightly: Derenbourg's edition misprints the word *ṣafrāʾ* by placing an extraneous diacritical dot above the first letter, resulting in the nonsensical word *ẓafrāʾ*.

ing qurʾanic language into his *Tafsīr* for its own sake. Surely, Saadiah feels under no cultural pressure to conform to a particular Islamic color scheme. And there is no doubt that the standard meaning for the word *ṣafrāʾ* in classical (as well as modern) Arabic is indeed "yellow" and not "red." Although terms for different colors develop and change over time, the distinction between "red" and "yellow" is considered to occur relatively early in a language's development, and is already clearly apparent in pre-Islamic poetry.[78] One cannot, therefore, assert that Saadiah understood the qurʾanic term *ṣafrāʾ* to mean the same thing as the biblical word *adumah*.

Joseph Qafiḥ, however, attempts to do so. In his translation of deviations from the literal meaning of the biblical text found in Saadiah's *Tafsīr*, which appears as one of the numerous biblical commentaries in the *Torat Ḥayyim* series, Qafiḥ notes that Saadiah also uses the root *ṣ.f.r.* in his translation of Job 16:16. That verse begins *panai ḥomarmeru mini bekhi*, "My face is red with weeping"; Saadiah's translation reads *wa-ʾṣfarra wajhī min al-bukaʾ*.[79] Qafiḥ argues that since the root *ṣ.f.r.* in Saadiah's *Tafsīr* of Job appears to signify "redden," by implication the adjective *ṣafrāʾ* in Num 19:2 should mean "red."[80] This logic is flawed, however, since Saadiah may not have provided a literal translation of Job 16:16 either. According to the dictionaries of both Dozy and Wehr (based on modern sources), the expression *aṣfarra wajh* means to turn pale, which one can reasonably understand as a result of crying. Although I have not found a classical Arabic dictionary that defines this expression

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[78] D. J. Stewart, "Color Terms in Egyptian Arabic," *The Language of Color in the Mediterranean*, ed. A. Borg (Stockholm, 1999), pp. 105–106. For a detailed study of color in pre-Islamic Arabic literature, see W. Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen in der Sprache der Altarabischen Dichtung* (Wiesbaden, 1965), pp. 233–382.

The vast majority of entries in Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *ṣ.f.r.*, are related to the color yellow or to something that is yellow, including gold and brass, the color of wheat just before it is fully ripe, dry herbage, barley, dates, and a certain stomach ailment which produces yellow water in the stomach or causes the victim's face to turn yellow. Lane does report that the *Miṣba* of al-Fayyūmī translates the word *ṣufra* as "a certain colour, well known, less intense than red, found in animals and in some other things, and . . . in water." By "less intense than red," al-Fayyūmī does not mean light red but rather what we call "yellow," which, according to Fischer, fits that description in early forms of Arabic; see *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen*, p. 237.

[79] See Bacher, ed., *Sefer Iyyov u-Seraḥo*, ad loc.

[80] J. Qafiḥ, *Tirgum ha-Tafsir shel Rav Seʿadiah Gaʾon* (Jerusalem, 1984), reprinted in *Torat Ḥayyim* (Jerusalem, 1986), Num 19:2.

explicitly, several do report that the word *ṣafar* means "a certain disease in the belly, which renders the face yellow [*yaṣfarra minhi al-wajh*]."[81] It appears that Saadiah uses a colloquial expression in his translation of Job 16:16, which therefore cannot be used to show how he defines the word *ṣafrā'*.

One should also note that the Hebrew *adom*, "red," is the only color in the Torah which Saadiah translates using more than one Arabic root. While the Hebrew words for white, black, green, and yellow are all paired with one Arabic root,[82] words related to the color red are translated using three different roots. The Hebrew word *me'addamim*, which refers to tanned or reddened animal skins (Exod 25:5, 26:14, 35:7, 35:23, 36:19), is translated with the cognate Arabic word *adīm*. All other forms of the color *adom* are translated with the Arabic root *ḥ.m.r.*, with the glaring exception of Num 19:2, which is rendered *ṣafrā'*.[83] Since Saadiah is generally consistent in his translations and since there is no strong evidence to the contrary, it is rather far-fetched to assert that Saadiah deviated from his standard Arabic equivalent for the word "red" in favor of another word which, although it is generally defined as "yellow," Saadiah himself defines as "red." Rather, it appears that Saadiah consciously chooses to forego a literal translation of the cow's color in favor of the qur'anic parallel. Why?

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[81] Dozy, *Supplément*, s.v. *ṣ.f.r.*; Wehr, *A Dictionary*, s.v. *ṣ.f.r.* The translation of *ṣafar* is taken from Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *ṣ.f.r.*, who credits this definition to the *Muḥkam* of Ibn Sida (d. 1066) and the *Qamūs* of Firuzabadi (1329–1414); this definition also appears in the *Lisān al-'Arab* of Ibn Mukarram (1233–1311), which I consulted in reproducing the Arabic in this definition.

[82] Saadiah translates the Hebrew *ṣahov* with its Arabic cognate, *aṣhab*. (On the subject of cognates in Saadiah's translation, see above, n. 22.) Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen*, pp. 369–373, explains that *aṣhab* is a subset of the broader color category *aṣfar* and connotes "blond" or "light yellow."

[83] The only other occasions of which I am aware in which Saadiah uses the root *ṣ.f.r.* in his translations are his rendering of Job 16:16, discussed above, and his translation of the precious stone *bareqet* in Exod 28:17, 39:10. JPS translates this stone as "emerald," and it seems that Onkelos also considers the stone to be green in hue. As noted above, Ibn Ezra disapproved of Saadiah's translations of "families, cities, animals, birds, and rocks" (Ibn Ezra on Gen 2:10, cited above, n. 16); he ridicules Saadiah for understanding the word *bareqet* as deriving from the word *baraq*, lightning, in his *Shorter Commentary* on Exod 28:30. Qafiḥ, *Tirgum ha-Tafsir*, Exod 28:17, offers the gloss "green like gold" to explain why Saadiah uses a word related to gold to describe a rock generally considered to be green.

Qafiḥ, in his first collection and translation of excerpts from Saadiah's *Tafsīr* (published over twenty years before the collection that appears in the *Torat Ḥayyim* series), offers the following answer.

> [The word *ṣafrā'* means] yellowish-brown, like the color of a dark egg yolk, which is the natural color and shade of most cows. And the command is that [the cow being sacrificed] should be entirely of one shade and not of a mixture. But actual red like blood is something that does not exist in reality and, if it could be found, would be nothing less than a great wonder. And it is not possible that [the Children of Israel] would be commanded regarding something that is not natural.[84]

Qafiḥ makes the argument that Saadiah was unwilling to accept the literal meaning of the biblical verse for reasons associated with his belief that all divine commandments can be accomplished in this world. The rabbinic tradition acknowledges the extreme rarity and consequent value of red heifers (e.g., bQid 31a), but never questions the notion that cows can indeed be red; Saadiah, according to Qafiḥ, disagrees. Since Saadiah does not believe that red cows exist naturally, he cannot accept the notion that God commanded the Children of Israel to sacrifice one and therefore picked a more natural color (Qafiḥ does not notice the qur'anic influence here).[85] But is yellow (even dark-yolk yellow) a natural color for cows? Classical Islamic commentators on Qur'an 2:69 maintain that it is not. The preeminent Sunni commentator Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (Baghdad, 839–910 CE), a near contemporary of Saadiah, reports that because the Children of Israel asked for details about what kind of cow to sacrifice in order to cause trouble, God made it harder for them to find the proper cow, which could only be obtained at great cost.[86] Qafiḥ himself seems to have had second thoughts about this

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[84] J. Qafiḥ, *Perushei Rabbenu Se'adiah Ga'on la-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1963), Num 19:2. The translation is mine.

[85] Had Saadiah in fact wanted to use a word connoting a more realistic shade of red for cows, he could have used the term *ashqar*, which connotes deep red or reddish brown and is used to refer to sorrel horses; see Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen*, pp. 343–346.

[86] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl Ayy al-Qur'ān*, eds. M. M. and A. M. Shakir (Cairo, 1954), 2:185–187. See also M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (Albany, 1984), 1:116–119. Many of the Islamic traditions regarding the yellow cow contained in the collections of both al-Ṭabarī and Ayoub are strikingly similar to the talmudic account of how the red heifer was procured (bQid 31a).

interpretation, since he replaced it with the Job argument in his more recent collection of Saadiah's interpretive translations.

The key to understanding Saadiah's use of the word ṣafrāʾ in this context, a term clearly derived from the Qurʾan, is to examine how Saadiah's Muslim contemporaries interpreted the quranic passage. Al-Ṭabarī's commentary contains several different understandings of the phrase from Qurʾan 2:69, but the one apparently accepted by al-Ṭabarī himself is that ṣafrāʾ fāqiʿ lawnuhā means "black (aswad), intense in its blackness." He states that a black camel is typically described as being ṣafr, "and this is said regarding camels because their blackness inclines toward yellowness."[87] This understanding of the root ṣ.f.r. when applied to animals as connoting blackness is also mentioned in the dictionary al-Ṣiḥāḥ by al-Jawharī, who studied in Baghdad and died in the early 11th century.[88] It appears that medieval Iraqis understood the word ṣafrāʾ to mean black in certain contexts as well as yellow, and al-Ṭabarī applied this understanding of the word to the qurʾanic reference to the cow. It is not unreasonable to argue that Saadiah understood the qurʾanic reference to ba-qara ṣafrāʾ in the same manner as his nearly contemporaneous and geographically proximate Islamic counterpart, and that Saadiah used the qurʾanic word ṣafrāʾ in his translation of Num 19:2 to mean black, not yellow and not red. Given the fact that Saadiah is known to have shared al-Ṭabarī's style of exegesis,[89] it is also quite possible that Saadiah learned this interpretation directly from the work of al-Ṭabarī.

Saadiah's use of the word ṣafrāʾ to refer to the biblical heifer, if understood in light of al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of that word in the context of Qurʾan 2:69, corresponds perfectly with what we have already seen about the gaon's interpretive method. As Qafiḥ correctly notes in his earlier collection, Saadiah was troubled by what he perceived to be the scientific impossibility of cows being a natural shade of red. He wished to eliminate the logical as well as theologi-

[87] Shakir and Shakir, eds., Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, 2:199–200. The other alternatives al-Ṭabarī cites in his Tafsīr are: the horns and hooves were yellow, the cow was untamed, and the cow really was yellow. On the word aṣfar in connection with the color of animals in general and blackish animals in particular, see Fischer, Farb- und Formbezeichnungen, pp. 363–365.

[88] Al-Jawharī, Tāj al-Lugha wa-Ṣiḥāḥ al-ʿArabiyya (Beirut, 1979), s.v. ṣ.f.r. This definition also appears in the earlier dictionary of al-Azharī (895–981).

[89] See above, n. 21.

cal difficulty associated with a divine commandment reliant upon the occurrence of the miraculous. Consequently, Saadiah chose to "mistranslate" the word adumah as ṣafrāʾ in accordance with the qurʾanic parallel in 2:69 which—as he and some Islamic interpreters understood it—offers a more realistic and less theologically problematic description of the cow. Although Saadiah's use of this particular qurʾanic term cannot be ascribed to general cultural influence, his interpretation of that term must be understood in light of his cultural context. The translation of Num 19:2 indicates that the gaon knew and relied on the Qurʾan in a manner parallel to, if not derived from, the way in which it was interpreted by his contemporaries. This example again shows Saadiah's use of Islamic sources (cf. qamīṣ in Genesis 39) to resolve difficulties in the Bible (cf. elohim in Gen 3:5), even when these sources directly contradict the evident meaning of the biblical text (cf. shur in Gen 16:7). Our discussion of this particular passage also demonstrates that Saadiah did not learn the Qurʾan in a vacuum; his understanding of that text must be understood in light of contemporary Sunni Islamic interpretations (cf. mutʿa in Deut 23:18), with which he may well have been familiar.

CONCLUSION

It was stated at the outset of this article that Saadiah had at least five distinct objectives in mind in writing his Tafsīr: to provide an Arabic rendering of the "plain text of the Torah," to educate and guide the assimilated Jewish 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, and to refute heretical and Karaite beliefs. Because Saadiah consciously limits his Tafsīr to the format of a translation and not a commentary, he addresses many of these objectives only indirectly by offering, for example, a rabbinic translation of the verses about boiling a kid in its mother's milk. Such a translation both brings the Written Law into conformity with the Oral Law and refutes heretical assertions that rabbinic law has no biblical basis. Saadiah's use of Islamic sources obviously cannot serve to advance either of these two objectives, but the specific Islamic terms and traditions he employs in the Tafsīr do appear intended to advance the gaon's other goals.

Saadiah was interested in providing a complete and accurate account of the biblical text to an Arabic-speaking audience. He therefore uses precise Arabic terms, such as imām and rasūl, even though

these terms have Islamic connotations which the more generic cognates *kāhin* and *nabi* do not have. He also replaces imprecise biblical language about particular myths with more specific information drawn from the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. As a result of this borrowing, the gaon is able to inform his audience that Hagar was not merely on the road to Shur but was in fact headed for Mecca, and that the article of clothing torn off of Joseph by his seducer is specifically a *qamīṣ*. From Saadiah's perspective, the only accurate interpretation of the Bible is one that conforms to reason, and the gaon makes use of Islamic sources to interpret passages that might appear to be irrational. Saadiah turns to the qur'anic version of the myth about the fruit of the tree in order to translate the problematic biblical word *elohim*, and considers the qur'anic color of the special cow to be more reasonable and therefore more accurate than the color stipulated in the Torah and unhesitatingly accepted in talmudic sources. Saadiah's use of well-known Islamic terms and traditions in order to produce a more complete, accurate, and rational rendition of the Torah also serves to advance his goal of reaching an assimilated Jewish audience. The gaon's attention to proper Arabic literary style and his use of a phraseology derived from Islamic sources similarly further this goal. Saadiah's insertion into the Torah of a prohibition against *mut'a* can also be understood in light of his interest in educating the Jewish masses.

A close reading of Saadiah's *Tafsīr* in light of its Islamic parallels indicates that the gaon was quite knowledgeable about the dominant religion of his time, and in certain respects quite accepting of its traditions. Islam's influence on Saadiah accounts not only for his rationalist philosophy but also for some of the specific ways in which he reconciled that rationalism with the biblical text and in which he presented that text to his assimilated Jewish audience. Saadiah certainly was not trying to syncretize Judaism with Islam or write an Islamicized translation of the Torah for the benefit of Muslims; had he so desired, he could easily have incorporated many more references to the Qur'an into his *Tafsīr*. The gaon was, however, willing to take from Islam those terms, traditions, and insights which he found to be valuable for his own purposes, and he was able to integrate them successfully into a work that remains quintessentially Jewish, so much so that his *Tafsīr* came to be accepted as the authoritative rabbinic translation of the Torah into Arabic.

It may prove worthwhile to examine the way in which Islamic elements incorporated into Saadiah's *Tafsīr* affected subsequent bib-

lical interpretation. On the one hand, many subsequent interpreters adopted certain translations that show evidence of Islamic influence, including the gaon's understanding of Gen. 3:5.[90] On the other hand, we have seen that many copyists were unwilling to accept the *Tafsīr*'s one obvious and affirmative reference to Islamic tradition, the statement that Hagar was on the road to Mecca when she met the angel of God. Did subsequent rabbinic commentators generally adopt other interpretations in the *Tafsīr* based on Islamic sources, such as the color of the purificatory heifer or the meaning of the word *qedeshah*? Did subsequent Jewish writers follow Saadiah's practice of using Islamic terminology or adding descriptions to the name of God? Who noticed the gaon's use of Islamic material, and how was that use regarded? Did Islam's influence on Saadiah and on his *Tafsīr* have any lasting impact within Judaism? However these questions may ultimately be answered, this study serves to reinforce the importance of considering the role of Islam seriously when examining Judaism in the medieval Arabic-speaking world in general and the works of Saadiah Gaon in particular, not only as an external force in conflict with Judaism but also as a resource available to be tapped and selectively incorporated into normative Jewish thought.[91]

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[90] See, for example, the comments of Ibn Ezra, David Qimḥi (Radak), and Ḥizqiya b. Manoaḥ (Ḥizkuni) on Gen 3:5, all of whom accept the translation of *ke-elohim* as *ke-malakhim* without hesitation. Not all of Saadiah's changes, however, met with universal acceptance among the European interpreters of the Torah even when Saadiah's interpretation was used by one or another Arabic-speaking commentator. As noted above (see n. 56), Ibn Ezra builds on Saadiah's translation of *shur* as Mecca in his comment that the spring at which the angel appeared to Hagar is the spring of Zamzam associated with the *hajj* pilgrimage. Radak, in contrast, specifically notes in his commentary on Gen 16:8 that the well is on the road to Shur, located at the border with Egypt; see David Qimḥi, [*Commentary*] *on the Book of Genesis*, ed. M. Katzenelbogen (Jerusalem, 1980), reprinted in *Torat Ḥayyim*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem, 1986), Gen 16:8. In another instance of Saadiah's translation entering into medieval European commentary literature, Radak notes Saadiah's translation of *mesha* as Mecca in his comment on Gen 10:30; Ibn Ezra does not comment on this verse. Blan, "Some Instances," attributes the use by Karaite translators of *imām* as a translation of *kohen* to the influence of Saadiah's *Tafsīr*; see above, n. 24.

[91] I would like to express my appreciation for the detailed comments and constructive criticism provided on earlier drafts of this work by Raymond Scheindlin of the Jewish Theological Seminary and by Camilla Adang of Tel Aviv University, one of the readers for *JQR*.