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**Tamar Zewi**

***The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch: Critical Edition and Study of MS London BL OR7562 and Related MSS***

Biblia Arabica 3

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Saadya Gaon (882–942), one of the most significant Jewish sages from the medieval period, wrote widely on a host of philosophical, halakic, and exegetical issues in Arabic as well as in Hebrew. His *Tafsīr*, or translation of the Pentateuch, was incredibly influential, as Tamar Zewi states: it “soon became authoritative among Rabbanite Jews and dominated their scholarly world” (14).<sup>1</sup> In the volume under review, *The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch*, Zewi provides readers with a critical edition of that Samaritan version found in MS London BL OR7562, along with more than 180 pages of scholarly discussion situating this manuscript in its broader context, both of Saadya Gaon's *Tafsīr* and in the context of Arabic Bible translations and of Arabic and related translations among Muslims, Christians, Samaritans, and Karaites in general. Zewi is well known for her work in Semitic linguistics, especially Hebrew, but also in Arabic (Classical, Judaeo-Arabic, as well as Samaritan Arabic). Here she builds on her work focusing specifically on the Samaritan version of Saadya Gaon's *Tafsīr*.

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1. As Zewi mentions later, “By this time [the first stage of MS London BL OR7562], Saadya's translation had become a standard version that was common in non-Jewish communities as well as highly esteemed by the Samaritans even though they possessed their own translation, transmitted mainly as the early Samaritan Arabic and its later revision” (47).

Zewi's volume is divided neatly into two parts: Part 1, "The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch" (5–186), contains eight chapters of scholarly discussion of the background and significance the Samaritan edition of Saadya Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch, situating this work in its broader context. Part 2, "Critical Edition of MS London BL OR 7562" (249–501), contains the critical edition of the manuscript under discussion. Part 1 begins with a brief introduction (1–3). Then follows the first chapter, "Early Medieval Arabic Bible Translations" (7–24). This is an important chapter because it sets the background context for the Samaritan version Zewi examines within the broader context of early medieval Arabic Bible translations.<sup>2</sup>

The second chapter, "Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch" (25–40), discusses Saadya Gaon's translation of the Pentateuch, his *Tafsīr*, including its dual transmission in Arabic and Hebrew scripts. The third chapter, "The Samaritan Version of Saadya Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch and Its Transmission" (41–54), focuses specifically on the Samaritan version of Saadya's *Tafsīr*. Chapter 4, "Characteristics of MS London BL OR 7562: Script and Orthography" (55–67), explores the Samaritan script and orthography of the first stage of the edition under discussion (MS London BL OR 7562). The fifth chapter, "Characteristics of MS London BL OR 7562: Language" (68–104), takes a look at the language employed in the first stage of this edition, primarily focusing on grammatical issues and matters of vocabulary, but also the presence of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic elements. Chapter 6, "Characteristics of MS London BL OR7562: Adaptation to the Samaritan Pentateuch" (105–17), begins with a comparison of the Samaritan Hebrew Pentateuch with the Masoretic Text's version (105–12). The chapter then proceeds to look at various Samaritan and other textual additions to this version. The seventh chapter, "Christian and Karaite Parallels in MS London BL OR 7562 and in the Other Samaritan Arabic Translations of the Pentateuch" (118–64), examines various Christian and Karaite parallels to Saadya Gaon's *Tafsīr*. Chapter 8, "Non-Saadyan Samaritan Arabic Versions in the First Stage of MS London BL OR7562" (165–78), focuses on the question of "whether that manuscript [MS London BL OR7562] reflects mainly the early Samaritan Arabic translation or its later revision as well" (165). The ninth chapter offers a brief conclusion (179–82).

Finally, the tenth chapter is an introduction to the critical edition contained in part 2 (183–86), followed by bibliography (187–206) and indexes of authors (207–9), subjects (210–13), ancient sources (214–30), and words (231–48), broken up into words in Arabic in Arabic script (231–35), Arabic in Hebrew script (235–42), Aramaic (242–43), Hebrew (243–48), Persian (248), and Syriac (248). Then the volume continues beginning from the

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2. There are a number of important texts in Samaritan Arabic, not only in Samaritan Aramaic or Samaritan Hebrew.

“back” of the book for the second part, the critical edition, since Semitic languages read right-to-left. The critical edition involves: the standard text of MS London BL OR7562 for Genesis (255–308), Exodus (309–55), Leviticus (356–88), Numbers (389–435), and Deuteronomy (436–74), as well as appendices A, B, and C. Appendix A (475–81) contains portions from other manuscripts representing the Samaritan edition of Saadya’s *Tafsīr*, which Zewi thinks likely formed part of MS London BL OR7562. Appendix B (482–96) contains a portion of MS Oxford Bodl. OR139, which is the only portion of that manuscript (Deut 11:2–26:14) that represents Saadya’s edition. Appendix C (497–501) contains a short portion (Deut 32–34) taken from MS Manchester JRL Sam. 2, which represents the only portion of that manuscript that includes “a continuous Saadyan version” (183).

Zewi articulates the goal of her study as examining “the origins of the Samaritan Arabic translation of the Pentateuch” (8). Her specific argument is: “the Samaritans based their early Samaritan Arabic translation on the Christian Bible translations available to them ... as well as on a Syriac adaptation of Saadya’s *Tafsīr* in Arabic letters” (42). The evidence presented throughout does indeed support Zewi’s hypothesis, namely, “the non-Saadyan Samaritan Arabic translation incorporated into the first stage of MS London BL OR7562, along with a Saadyan version, was based on the early Samaritan Arabic translation and not on its later revision” (174). Summarizing the evidence and all of the material covered, Zewi concludes:

These suggest a channel of direct borrowing by the early Samaritan Arabic translation, and perhaps also its later revision, from Christian Arabic translations of the Peshitta tradition.... Christian Bible translations and Saadyan adaptations from the Peshitta tradition made a major contribution to the early Samaritan Arabic translation and its later revision.... the Saadyan version in the first stage of MS London BL OR7562 is based on a Christian adaptation, in the Peshitta tradition, of a copy of Saadya Gaon’s *Tafsīr* in Arabic characters, and ... this manuscript also contains elements of other Christian Arabic translations from the Peshitta tradition, probably composed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. All these sources are likely to have played a major role in the composition of the early Samaritan Arabic translation. (181)

This volume represents a superb work of scholarship and fits into the rapidly growing study of the Bible in Arabic translation and traditions represented by the Biblia Arabica Project, as well as the Biblia Arabica consultation at the meetings of the Society of Biblical

Literature.<sup>3</sup> Thus it represents the third volume in Brill's Biblia Arabica series. This work should be on the shelf of any scholar interested in Saadya Gaon, the Samaritans, or medieval Jewish biblical interpretation and translation. Arabic Bible translations and textual traditions are a vastly important but understudied area of investigation. Important works on this topic continue to emerge, like those of Sidney Griffith and Ronny Vollandt.<sup>4</sup> Zewi's work is an important contribution to this growing body of literature. May many more join this exciting field of discovery.

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3. Information on the Biblia Arabica project can be found at <http://biblia-arabica.com/>. I had the pleasure of attending one of the Biblia Arabica sessions at the 2015 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Atlanta and found the papers and discussion quite stimulating. I think this is one of the most significant new areas of research that has found a niche at the SBL.

4. I am thinking specifically of Sidney H. Griffith's very fine and accessible *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), which should be the starting point for novices to this discipline, so lucidly does Griffith write; and Ronny Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), which was the second volume in Brill's Biblia Arabica series and published the same year as Zewi's book. Zewi utilizes Griffith's work extensively, as well as other works by Vollandt, including his original 2011 Cambridge University doctoral dissertation that was the basis of Vollandt's 2015 volume above.