THE TORAH OF ISRAEL IN THE TONGUE OF ISHMAEL:
SAADIA GAON AND HIS ARABIC TRANSLATION
OF THE PENTATEUCH

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Introduction[†]

     In popular consciousness, one often encounters a notion that some great tension exists between the Hebrew and Arabic languages – a reflection, most probably, of the undeniable political tensions that exist between the contemporary state of Israel and its Arabic-speaking, largely Muslim, neighbours. All scholars of Hebrew, however, will be aware of the close linguistic relationship between Hebrew and Arabic – both being members of the Semitic branch of the larger Afroasiatic language family. Indeed awareness of this close relationship between the two languages has been a tool of biblical exegetes for many centuries now – many biblical scholars trained in the philological tradition will have studied some Arabic; and anybody who has used Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) or Koehler-Baumgartner (*HALOT*) will be familiar with the frequent citation of Arabic cognates in those lexicons. Most biblical scholars will also have an awareness of the so-called Golden Age of Spanish Jewry – that great flourishing of Jewish intellectual and artistic life that took place during the period of Islamic rule of the Iberian Peninsula, the medium for much of which was the Arabic language.[1] Moses Maimonides (1135–1204 CE) is probably the most famous representative of this cultural complex.[2]

     The grammatically informed biblical exegesis of other Andalusian Jewish scholars such as Menaḥem Ibn Saruq, Dunash Ibn Labraṭ and Judah

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[1] Muslim armies landed in Gibraltar in 711 CE. The last Islamic emirate was defeated in 1492 CE. The Jews of al-Andalus, to give the Iberian Peninsula its Arabic name, also wrote in Hebrew and Judaeo-Spanish (also known as Ladino and Judezmo).

[2] In the world of traditional Judaism, Maimonides is known as the Rambam – an acronym formed from his title and name in Hebrew: Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon. The Arabic form of his name was Mūsā ibn Maymūn.

Ḥayyuj may also be familiar.[3] Indeed, interest in this period of Jewish history is enjoying something of a popular revival. In the ever-expanding, post-9/11 literature on the relationship between Islam and the West, an idealized version of the (relatively peaceful) coexistence of Muslims, Jews and Christians under Islamic rule in Iberia – the *Convivencia* – is frequently presented as an antidote to the "Clash of Civilizations" paradigm articulated most famously by Samuel P. Huntington.[4]

This focus on the glories of Andalusian Jewry (and the Sephardic cultural complex that grew from it) has led to the unfortunate neglect of the non-Sephardic Arabo-Jewish world.[5] The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to one of the great pioneers of that world: Saadia Gaon (882-942). Saadia was an Egyptian Jew who rose from a humble and obscure background to attain the most important position of religious leadership in the Jewish world of his day: Gaon of the rabbinical academy (or *yeshiva*) of Sura. The particular focus of this paper is on his translation of the Pentateuch into Arabic – a work known as the *Tafsīr*.

1. The Jews and Islam

Saadia spent his whole life as a subject of Islamic states, so in order to better understand his life and work, it is necessary for us to briefly examine the Islamic view of Judaism and the status of Jews under Islamic rule. This is an area of great complexity and its study engenders considerable controversy. The relative fortunes of Jews under Christianity and Islam – under crescent and cross, to borrow the title of Mark R. Cohen's insightful study – have been compared and contrasted repeatedly.[6] Frequently, most especially in certain strains of contemporary popular political discourse, we encounter a simplistic caricature of Christian intolerance versus Islamic tolerance. The historical reality, of course, is far more complex and beyond the scope of this paper: we can only hope to begin to scratch the surface.

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[3] See, for instance, Angel Sáenz-Badillos, "Early Hebraists in Spain: Menaḥem ben Saruq and Dunash ben Labraṭ", in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*. Volume 1, *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*. Part 2, *The Middle Ages*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 96-105.

[4] Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993) 22-49.

[5] On the shifting meanings of the term Sephardic and its relationship with the controversial term Mizrahi, see Harvey E. Goldberg, "From Sephardi to Mizrahi and Back Again: Changing Meanings of 'Sephardi' in Its Social Environments", *Jewish Social Studies* N.S. 15 (2008) 165-88.

[6] Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Although usually viewed as the founder of Islam by non-Muslims, Muslims themselves do not regard the Prophet Muhammad (570-632 CE) as the originator of a new religion – nor did Muhammad so view himself. Rather, Islam sees itself as the primordial religion of humanity and Muhammad as the restorer of that faith. For Muslims, Muhammad was the final, and most important, of a long line of prophets that goes back to Adam. While some Islamic traditions mention a figure of 124,000 prophets before Muhammad, the Qur'ān mentions twenty-five explicitly by name – most of whom will be familiar from the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Among these twenty-five named prophets (*anbiyā'*; singular: *nabī*) some are accorded an even higher status, that of *rasūl* (often understood to denote a prophet who receives a written scripture; plural: *rusul*). These higher-grade prophets include Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Mūsā (Moses), 'Īsā (Jesus),[7] and, of course, Muhammad himself. The Qur'ān also mentions the names of some of these earlier revelations as, for instance, the *Tawrāt* given to Moses and the *Injīl* given to Jesus.[8]

The Qur'ān makes frequent reference to the continuity of Muhammad's message with those of earlier prophets. To give but one example: "Naught is said unto thee (Muhammad) save what was said unto the messengers before thee" (41:43).[9] However, the Qur'ān itself – the revelation brought by Muhammad – represents the most perfect form of God's eternal message to humanity. Muslims therefore believe that the Qur'ān abrogates all previous scriptures. A *ḥadīth*, or tradition, of the Prophet Muhammad offers us a vivid and arresting depiction of Islamic supersessionism. This *ḥadīth* narrates how 'Umar – a close companion of the Prophet and later, the second caliph of Islam – began on one occasion to read from a copy of the Torah to the Prophet Muhammad. The prophet became visibly angry at this, and silenced 'Umar with these words: "Were Moses to appear to you, and were you to follow him and leave me, you would stray from the Straight Path. Were he to be alive and to witness my Prophethood, he would follow me."[10]

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[7] Herein lies one of the major differences between Islam and Christianity: for Muslims, Jesus is a prophet of God – no more.

[8] The Arabic word *Injīl* is a rendering of the Greek εὐαγγέλιον, on *Tawrāt* see below.

[9] All quotations from the Qur'ān are taken from the translation of Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall: *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'ân* (originally published by Knopf in New York in 1930 but available now in countless editions). Pickthall's translation of the Qur'ān was the first by a native English-speaking Muslim. It also had the distinction of winning the "imprimatur" of al-Azhar – the Islamic university in Cairo founded in the tenth century and the leading centre of Sunni Islam.

[10] 'Abd al-Ghaffar Hasan, *The Way of the Prophet: A Selection of Hadith*, translated and edited by Usama Hasan (Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2009), 35.

Despite the abrogation of earlier revelations, it is an article of faith incumbent on all Muslims that they believe in all the prophets before Muhammad and the scriptures revealed to them.[11] In this context, however, it is important to note that from an Islamic perspective, the Scriptures in the possession of Jews and Christians represent distortions and falsifications of the original texts.[12] In addition to this, the Qur'ān contains a number of less-than-flattering verses regarding Jews and Christians.[13] However, as with the negative images of Jews encountered in the New Testament, theses verses need to be read in both their historical and literary contexts – and not, as we frequently encounter in contemporary anti-Islamic polemic, as proof-texts of Islamic intolerance.[14] One might broadly characterize the Islamic view of both Judaism and Christianity as being one of older, misguided (or sometimes, wilfully straying) siblings.

While all non-Muslims were categorized as unbelievers or infidels (in Arabic, *kuffār*; singular, *kāfir*), within that category, by virtue of their link, however degenerated, with earlier revelations, Jews and Christians possessed a special status. They were referred to as *People of the Book* (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), and consequently, they enjoyed a special legal status within the universal Islamic community (the *Umma*) – that of *dhimmīs* ("protected peoples"). This status (*dhimma*) entailed a range of restrictions and what we would now regard as discriminatory practices, such as the paying of a special poll-tax (the *jizya*) and the requirement to wear distinctive clothing. However, second-class citizenship as it was, the status of *dhimmī* did (in theory, at least) offer the Jews of the Islamic world a uniform legal status – sparing them the widely differing environments of mediaeval Christian Europe where their status frequently depended on the vagaries of local rulers.

Jews had lived in what are now Muslim-majority Arabic-speaking countries for many centuries before the Islamic conquests that began in the seventh century CE. The Jewish Diasporas of Babylon and Egypt, with their

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[11] See the *Ḥadīth of Jibrīl* in Hasan, *The Way of the Prophet*, 31–33. In the context of Muslim-Jewish relations, it is worth noting that Moses (Mūsā) is mentioned in the Qur'ān more than any other prophet – some 136 times. See Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufaharas li-Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Istanbul: al-Maktaba al-Islamīya, 1984), 680. From the same concordance, we note that Ibrahim is mentioned 69 times, Jesus 25.

[12] "There is a party of them who distort the Scripture with their tongues, that ye may think that what they say is from the Scripture, when it is not from the Scripture. And they say: It is from Allah, when it is not from Allah; and they speak a lie concerning Allah knowingly" (Qur'ān 3:78).

[13] See, for instance, Qur'ān 5:51 and the first half of 5:82.

[14] Indeed it is important to note that the Qur'ān also contains many positive references to Jews and Christians. See, for instance, the second half of 5:82 and 2:62.

origins in the pre-Christian era, will be familiar to all and need no introduction. There was even what we might call a Jewish state in the Arabian Peninsula just prior to the life and mission of the Prophet Muhammad. The last king of Ḥimyar, Yūsuf Dhū Nuwās, was a convert to Judaism who, following his conquest of the largely Christian city of Najrān in 524 CE, attempted to force Judaism on the population.[15]

Until relatively recent times, most Jews lived in the Islamic world: as Norman Stillman notes, "until the seventeenth century, Muslim lands were home to the majority of world Jewry, and during the Middle Ages, it was there that some of the greatest works of the Jewish intellectual and artistic spirit were created."[16]

In terms of the life of Saadia, three regions are of importance: Egypt, the land of his birth and early years; Palestine (or *Ereṣ Yisrāʾēl* as he would have known it), where he lived and studied for a time; and Iraq, the land of his later years and most notable activity. All three regions had Jewish communities of long-standing; and all three regions were very rapidly conquered by the Muslim armies and were incorporated into the Umma within just ten years of the death of Muhammad. It has been frequently observed that the Jewish, non-Ephesian and non-Chalcedonian Christian communities of the conquered territories welcomed the advent of Islamic rule since it represented an improvement in the status than that enjoyed (or endured) under Byzantine and Sasanian rule.[17]

The ʿAbbāsid caliphate forms the immediate background to the life and work of Saadia. According to the majority of Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad had died without appointing a successor – the Shīʿa believe otherwise. The void created by his death was filled by an institution known as the caliphate. The Umma was now led by a succession of rulers known as caliphs (Arabic: *khalīfa* "successor"). The caliphs, unlike Muhammad, were not prophets. However, like him, their authority was both spiritual and temporal in nature; if, indeed, such a distinction is possible during this stage of the caliphate. The ʿAbbāsids were a dynasty who had wrested power from the preceding Umayyad dynasty following a revolutionary struggle that ended in 749 CE. Significantly for the Jews of Babylonia, the ʿAbbāsids moved the centre of the caliphate from the Umayyad capital of

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[15] See Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 52-53.

[16] Norman A. Stillman, "The Jewish Experience in the Muslim World", in *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture,* ed. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85.

[17] See, for instance, Tamara Sonn, *A Brief History of Islam* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 24-5.

Damascus to Baghdad – a city which they founded in 762 CE. From Baghdad, the 'Abbāsid caliphs ruled territories that extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the River Indus. Such a relocation of the centre of political power lent a greater influence to the already influential Jewish intellectual centres of Babylonia. Scheindlin notes how this "centralization of Muslim power in Baghdad lent worldwide authority to the Jewish institutions of Iraq. The academies of Sura and Pumbethia moved to Baghdad; they raised funds from all over the Muslim world, and their leaders came to be considered the chief expositors of the Jewish religious tradition and the highest authorities in matters of religious law and practice."[18]

Two institutions dominated Iraqi Judaism in Saadia's time: the Exilarchate and the Gaonate. The office of Exilarch (*resh galutha*) was an ancient one, dating back to the Babylonian exile of the sixth century BCE. The holders of the office claimed Davidic descent, and their authority as the temporal leaders of the Jewish community was recognized and confirmed by the 'Abbāsids. Spiritual authority over the community was vested in the *geonim*: the heads of the two major *yeshivot* of Sura and Pumbedita. It was in these academies that the Babylonian Talmud reached its final authoritative form. Like the exilarchs, the geonim were confirmed in their offices by the caliph.

As we shall see presently, relations between the exilarchs and the geonim were not always harmonious, with the latter becoming increasingly dominant. Berkey notes that under Muslim rule the exilarchate became an increasingly ceremonial office, with "real authority over the community [passing] to the *geonim* and to the rabbis".[19] So central was the role of the *geonim* that in the periodization of rabbinic literature, the period from the sixth to the eleventh centuries as the *geonic* period.

'Abbāsid rule, particularly its first two centuries, constitutes something of a *Golden Age* of Islamic civilization. The caliphs oversaw the massive territorial expansion of their domains and a blossoming of intellectual life. In the latter category, we will mention two phenomena: the translation movement and the rise of Mu'tazilism. Muslims had been engaged in the translation of mainly Syriac and Greek texts into Arabic for some time. However, the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Ma'mūm (813-33 CE) founded

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[18] Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77.
[19] Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 93.

a library and research institution, the *Bayt al-Ḥikma* ("House of Wisdom"), to pursue the systematic translation of non-Arabic texts from a range of literary, scientific and philosophical genres into Arabic. The translation of these texts had the specific aim of edifying and enriching Arab-Islamic civilization.

The Muʻtazilites were a school of Islamic theologians who stressed the role of reason alongside that of revelation in theological investigation; they did not, as their enemies accused them, privilege reason over revelation. The Muʻtazilites were influenced by their reading of the Greek philosophers recently made available in Arabic through the efforts of the translation movement. Under the caliph al-Maʼmūn (d. 833 CE) and his two successors, Muʻtazilism enjoyed state support.

Writing some two centuries later than Saadia's era, the twelfth-century Navarrese Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela has the following to say about Jewish Baghdad: "In Baghdad there are about 40,000 Jews and they dwell in security, prosperity and honour under the great Caliph, and amongst them are great sages". He also paints a most-probably idealized portrait of the ʻAbbāsid caliph (without naming him – he could be any one of three that reigned between 1136 and 1180 CE), noting that he "is kind unto Israel, and many belonging to the people of Israel are his attendants; he knows all languages, and is well versed in the law of Israel. He reads and writes the holy language (Hebrew)."[20]

We might conclude this section by quoting Raymond P. Scheindlin's acute observation on the status of Jews in the world of Islam: "The Jews did not blunder into the Muslim world as immigrants or exiles. They were part of the population of Western Asia, North Africa, and Iberia … where medieval Arabo-Islamic culture developed as an amalgamation of Arabic language, Islamic religion, and local culture. Jews were an intrinsic part of this culture. They resembled their neighbours in their names, dress, and language as well as in most other features of their culture, except of course, in their religion, their sense of their own distinctiveness, their view of history, and the institutional affiliations that flowed from these differences."[21]

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[20] Marcus N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Critical Text, Translation and Commentary* (London: Henry Frowde, 1907), 39, 35.
[21] Raymond P. Scheindlin, "Merchants and Intellectuals, Rabbis and Poets: Judaeo-Arabic Culture in the Golden Age of Islam", in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 317.

2. Saadia Gaon

2.1 His Life

Before looking at his life, let us say something about our exegete's name.[22] The most frequently encountered designation – Saadia Gaon – combines a given name and a title. The title *gaon*, as we have seen, was given to the heads of the main Babylonian *yeshivot* of Sura and Pumbedita (both of which relocated to the city of Baghdad in the tenth century, while retaining their original names). His given name, Saadia (Hebrew: סְעַדְיָה) is not biblical; but it is a theophoric one formed from the verb סעד ("to support") and structurally identical to numerous such names found in the Bible. However, Saadia is probably a Hebraized form of the common Arabic name Saʿīd ("happy" or "fortunate") – though some scholars see the latter as an Arabized form of the former.[23] His full Arabic name was Saʿīd ibn Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, which tells us that his father's name was Yūsuf (the Arabic form of Joseph) and that he was from the Fayyum – a region in Lower Egypt.

Saadia's life can be divided into three phases: the Egyptian, the Palestinian and the Iraqi (or Babylonian). He spent most of his life in the two oldest centres of the Diaspora: Egypt and Babylonia, with a brief interlude in Palestine. He was born in the village of Dīlāṣ, in the Fayyum in 882 CE. We know little of his early life. Saadia himself claimed Judahite descent, but later opponents alleged that his family were Egyptian proselytes and ridiculed his humble origins – his father Yūsuf may have been a labourer or tradesman. We do know, however, that before Saadia left Egypt for the East in 915 CE, he was already a formidable scholar: he had written his pioneering Hebrew dictionary, the *'Agrôn* and composed a polemic against Anan ben David – the founder of the Karaite sect. Indeed, this last work, according to Malter (his early twentieth-century biographer) may have precipitated Saadia's departure from Egypt in 915 CE – then a Karaite stronghold.[24] This work also established Saadia as a staunch and capable defender of the Rabbanite party in its struggle with the Karaites.

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[22] On Saadia's life see the following: Henry Malter, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1921); Abraham S. Halkin et al., "Saadiah (Ben Joseph) Gaon", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XIV (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 543-55; Paul B. Fenton, "Saʿadyā Ben Yōsēf", in *Encyclopedia of Islam* VIII, ed. P. J. Bearman et al., 2nd edition (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2005), 661-2; Norman Roth, "Saʿadyah Gaon", in *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Norman Roth (London: Routledge, 2003), 581-4.

[23] On this point, see Malter, *Saadia Gaon*, 26.

[24] Malter, *Saadia Gaon*, 262.

After leaving Egypt, Saadia spent a number of years in Palestine, where, according to the tenth-century Muslim historian al-Mas'ūdī (who claims to have met personally met him in Tiberias) he studied with Abū Kathīr bin Zakriya al-Kātib.[25] Al-Mas'ūdī also mentions Saadia's work translating the Hebrew Bible into Arabic. In 921 CE, Saadia left Palestine and continued his journey eastward to Baghdad. Here began the most active period of his life in what was then the most venerable and influential centre of Jewish life. That same year, Saadia became involved in the bitter calendrical controversy between the heads of the Babylonian *yeshivot* and Aaron ben Meir, head of the Jerusalem *yeshiva*. Saadia took the side of the Babylonians, and his vigorous defence of their position played a major part in their victory. The intricacies of this dispute are beyond the scope of this paper today. In essence though, the dispute centred on the fixing of the dates of Passover and Rosh Hashanah in the year 4682 AM (922 CE).

The victory of the Babylonians in the calendrical dispute initiated a period of rejuvenation of the Babylonian *yeshivot*. Saadia was to play an even more central role in this process when in 928 CE he was appointed Gaon of Sura by the Exilarch, David ben Zakkai. This position made Saadia the foremost intellectual and spiritual leader of the Jewish world of his day. His attainment of this position was remarkable given his humble non-Babylonian background. His appointment, then, must have been based on his scholarly merit and the skill he displayed in religious debate. A contemporary report prepared for the Exilarch was fulsome in its praise of Saadia, but sounded a note of caution regarding his independent spirit: "Although he is a great man and a profound scholar, he is not afraid of any man and does not show favour to anyone because of his great knowledge, eloquence, and piety."[26]

Saadia's rejuvenation of the *yeshiva* of Sura – and of Babylonian Jewry as a whole – was interrupted by another controversy. The dispute, this time with Ben Zakkai the Exilarch who had appointed him, supposedly

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[25] Indeed, al-Mas'ūdī claims to have personally encountered Saadia and mentions his activity in translating the Bible into Arabic from Hebrew. See al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-ashrāf*, BGA 8, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 113. Al-Mas'ūdī was not the only Muslim author to mentions Saadia. Ibn al-Nadīm (fl. 987) mentions Saadia and lists eleven of his works in the *Fihrist* – a bibliographical treatise and one of our most important sources for the intellectual life of 'Abbāsid Baghdad. He states: "Al-Fayyūmī was one of the most eminent of the Jews and of their scholars who were versed in the Hebrew language. In fact the Jews consider that there was nobody else like al-Fayyūmī. His name was Sa'īd, also to be said Sa'dīyā, and he lived so recently that some of our contemporaries were alive before he died"; see Bayard Dodge (ed. and tr.), *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture,* 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) II, 44.

[26] Halkin et al., "Saadiah (Ben Joseph) Gaon", 545.

centred on Saadia's refusal to confirm a will of which Ben Zakkai was a major beneficiary. The dispute, which included mutual excommunications, and into which the caliph was drawn, led to Saadia being deposed as Gaon in 932 CE after only four years in office. However, the conflict may well have been rooted in older rivalries between the institutions of the Gaonate and the Exilarchate – between secular and religious authorities.[27]

The parties were reconciled sometime in 937 CE and Saadia was reappointed Gaon of Sura. His period of enforced retirement was not unproductive however, as during it, Saadia composed his philosophical-theological masterpiece: *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*. Saadia died in office in 942 CE after what can only be described as an eventful and highly productive life. A measure of the man's personal character and integrity can be seen in the report that when the son of the then deceased Exilarch Ben Zakkai died, Saadia brought up his old rival's orphan grandson as a member of his household.

2.2 His Works

Saadia was a prolific as well as pioneering author. Malter notes how the Gaon's "literary activity embraced nearly all the branches of knowledge known and cultivated among the Jews and Arabs of his day", and he devotes some 165 pages of his biography of Saadia to listing the sage's works.[28] Here we must confine ourselves to a very broad outline of his oeuvre, singling out some of his most noteworthy works. Saadia's literary production took in Hebrew linguistics (both grammar and lexicography), *halakah*, philosophy (or philosophical theology), liturgy, anti-Karaite polemic, chronology, and, most relevantly for our purposes, biblical exegesis and translation.

Saadia is regarded as the founder of the Hebrew linguistic tradition. In this regard, we can again mention the *'Agrôn* – his dictionary of Hebrew compiled for the use of *paytanim* (liturgical poets); and the *Kutub al-Lugha* ("Books on the [Hebrew] Language") – a volume of twelve treatises on Hebrew grammar written in Arabic. Both works have survived in fragments only, but Saadia's precedence in this field was acknowledged as early as the eleventh century by Ibn Ezra who called him "the first grammarian".[29] Saadia also composed a treatise on some ninety biblical *hapax legomena*.

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[27] See, for instance, Solomon Zeitlin, "Saadia Gaon: Champion for Jewish Unity under Religious Leadership", *JQR* N.S. 33 (1943) 366.

[28] Malter, *Saadia Gaon*, 137, and 137-302.

[29] David Tene, "Linguistic Literature", in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* XVI, 1353.

In addition to the individual *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) that he wrote, Saadia was, according to Malter, "the first scientific author in the field of liturgy".[30] His *Siddur* – believed to be one of the first ever compiled – was written in Arabic and aimed to provide Arabic-speaking Jews with a halakically sound order of the synagogue service. Malter sees this pioneering work as part of Saadia's defence of Rabbanite Judaism from the Karaite challenge, since liturgy was a frequent locus of the sectarian struggles.[31]

As Gaon of Sura, Saadia composed and issued numerous *responsa* to queries sent to him from throughout Jewry. Fenton points out that Saadia was the first Jewish sage "to have composed his decisions in Arabic".[32] He also notes that Saadia was one of the first sages to compile his *responsa* as thematic monographs and attributes this innovation to the inspiration of similar collections of Islamic *fatwās*.

Outside of biblical circles, Saadia is probably best remembered for his *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa-l-i'tiqādāt* (*Book of Doctrines and Beliefs*) composed in Arabic, as noted above, during his years out of gaonic office. This work is often regarded as one of the first major works of Jewish philosophy. Daniel Frank describes the *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* as "a philosophical defense of, an apology for, traditional (rabbinic) Judaism, offered to those mired in confusion and whose traditional beliefs are without sturdy foundation".[33]

Saadia's defence of Judaism was inspired by the contemporary Islamic science of *Kalām* (literally "speech" or "discourse") or speculative theology. Ibn Khaldūn, the great fourteenth-century Muslim polymath, defines *Kalām* thus: "This is a science that involves arguing with logical proofs in defence of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy."[34] The most famous Muslim practitioners of *Kalām* were the Mu'tazilites mentioned earlier. The *Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* – a work of Jewish *Kalām* – was translated into Hebrew as the *Sēfer Emûnôt ve-Dəʿôt* by Judah Ibn Tibbon in 1186 CE, and until the appearance of Maimonides' *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn* (*Guide of the Perplexed*), it was the major work of mediaeval Jewish

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[30] Malter, *Saadia Gaon*, 147.
[31] Malter, *Saadia Gaon*, 146.
[32] Fenton, "Sa'adyā Ben Yōsēf," 661.
[33] Daniel H. Frank, "Introduction", in Alexander Altmann (ed. and tr.), Saadya Gaon, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 2.
[34] Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, tr. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 348.

philosophy. Maimonides' *Guide* was translated into Hebrew in 1190 CE as the *Môreh Nevûkhîm* by Samuel Ibn Tibbon – the son of Saadia's translator.

Like all the early Hebrew grammarians and lexicographers, Saadia's linguistic endeavours were part of the larger project of biblical exegesis. Saadia wrote a commentary on almost half of the Pentateuch and compositions combining both translation and explicit commentary of other biblical books, including Isaiah, Proverbs, Psalms, Job and Daniel.[35] However, the most well-known example of his biblical exegesis is his translation into Arabic of the Pentateuch – the *Tafsīr* – and it is to this work that we shall now turn our attention.

3. The *Tafsīr* and its Language

The language in which the *Tafsīr* was composed is most commonly referred to as Judaeo-Arabic – but as to what this term actually denotes, there is no universal agreement.[36] Is Judaeo-Arabic a distinct language, a dialect or an ethnolect? How does it differ – if at all – from Arabic as used by Muslims and Christians? Key elements in definitions of Judaeo-Arabic typically include: Jewish authorship, Jewish subject matter, use of Hebrew script and presumption of familiarity with Hebrew.[37]

In reviewing a number of definitions, Khan notes that the "term 'Judaeo-Arabic' refers to a type of Arabic that was used by Jews and was distinct in some way from other types of Arabic".[38] The nature of this distinctiveness, however, is still widely debated and, according to some scholars, such as Norman Roth, the "peculiarity" of Judaeo-(and Christian) Arabic has been overemphasized.[39]

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[35] Robert Brody, "The Geonim of Babylonia as Biblical Exegetes", in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*. Vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*. Part 2, *The Middle Ages* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 77.

[36] Any investigation of Judaeo-Arabic must begin by consulting the work of Joshua Blau (b. 1919); see, for instance, his *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study in the Origins of Middle Arabic*, 2nd edition (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1981); the essays collected in his *Studies in Middle Arabic and its Judaeo-Arabic Variety* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988); on the *Tafsīr* specifically see Joshua Blau, "The Linguistic Character of Saadia Gaon's Translation of the Pentateuch", *Oriens* 36 (2001) 1-9.

[37] See, for instance, Paul B. Fenton, "Judaeo-Arabic Literature", in *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, ed. M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Sergeant, Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 462.

[38] Geoffrey Khan, "Judaeo-Arabic and Judaeo-Persian", in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 601.

[39] Norman Roth, "Languages, Used by Jews", in *Medieval Jewish Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, Routledge Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages VII, ed. Norman Roth (New

One of the most typical and visually distinctive features of Judaeo-Arabic texts is the fact that they are usually written using the Hebrew writing system.[40] But we do not even know if Saadia used the Hebrew script to write the *Tafsīr*. Ibn Ezra, in his comment on Gen 2:11, notes that the Gaon "translated the Torah into the language of Ishmael, using their script".[41] This is no small point: if Saadia wrote the *Tafsīr* using the Arabic script, his potential readership would have included Muslims and Christians as well as the Jews who requested it.

Central to the overemphasis on the peculiarity of Judaeo-Arabic is the identification of Arabic with Islam – or rather, to borrow a term from psychology – the overidentification of Arabic with Islam. Arabic undoubtedly plays a special, indeed central, role in Islam as the language of revelation. The Qur'ān – for Muslims the actual word of God – was revealed to Muhammad in Arabic and the text makes frequent references to itself as "an *Arabic* Qur'ān".

One of the key Islamic doctrines regarding the Qur'ān is its untranslatability. Although translations of the Qur'ān into most of the languages of the world exist and are read by Muslims for purposes of study, these translations cannot and do not replace the original in a ritual context: if it is not in Arabic, it is not the Qur'ān – it is a pale shadow of the original.[42] Arabic is also the language of the *ṣalāt* – the canonical prayers of Islam. Muslims – whether they speak Arabic or not – must recite these prayers in Arabic five times per day. Arabic is also the language of Islamic religious discourse.

Closely related to this overidentification of Arabic with Islam is an overidentification of Arabs with Muslims. Not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslims. Indeed most of the world's 1.5 billion Muslims are not Arabs. And although the majority of Arabic-speakers today are Muslims, there are still significant non-Muslim Arabic-speaking minorities throughout the Arab World and Israel and the world-wide migrant

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York: Routledge, 2003), 389-95, 389.

[40] A similar phenomenon will be familiar to scholars of the Syriac Christian traditions: Garshūnī (or Karshūnī) – the writing of Arabic using the Syriac script. Griffith has noted that this practice "graphically reflects the dual culture of Christians in the world of Islam," a statement we could easily apply to Jews writing Arabic in Hebrew script. See Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 174.

[41] Ibn Ezra on Genesis 2:11 in *Miqra'ot Gedolot Me'orot* (Jerusalem: Baruchman, 1996), 25.

[42] See Mustansir Mir, "Language", in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 88-90.

communities.[43] These overidentifications have the unfortunate consequence of silencing the voices of non-Muslim Arabs. One of the main reasons for the neglect and silencing of Arab (or, as some would insist on calling them, Arabic-speaking) Jewish history and culture has been the rise of Arab nationalism and Zionism and the political events arising from the clash of these ideologies. Snir explains the situation thus: "From the late 1940s, Arab Jewish culture underwent a process of marginalization and negligence within both the Muslim Arab and Jewish Hebrew cultural systems, and declined sharply. The Muslim Arab and the Jewish Zionist canonical cultural and national systems, each from their own particularist considerations, have generally rejected the legitimacy of Arab Jewish hybridity."[44]

However, as noted earlier, Jews had lived in what became Muslim-majority lands long before the appearance of Islam in the seventh century CE; and despite the overidentification of Arabic with Islam, Jews (and indeed Christians) have spoken Arabic for just as long. One of the great pre-Islamic Arabic poets, al-Sama'wal ibn 'Ādiyā', was a Jew. The corpus of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is still widely read and appreciated in the Arabic-speaking world, where it serves as a paradigm of literary beauty. The Jewishness of al-Sama'wal has not stopped his name becoming a byword for loyalty – *awfā min al-Sama'wal* –"more loyal than al-Sama'wal", remains a popular proverb among Arabic speakers.[45]

Now to the *Tafsīr* itself. The title of the work deserves some attention. The Arabic word *tafsīr* is used in Islamic discourse to denote the science of Qur'ānic exegesis (*Tafsīr*) and any of the many exemplars of that genre, such as the *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE). *Tafsīr*, which is cognate with the Hebrew *pesher*, means explanation, interpretation or commentary. It does not really have the sense of translation. The verb to translate in

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[43] To take a few examples: the Copts of Egypt constitute at least 9% of the population of approximately 82 million; in Lebanon Christians make up some 36% of the population of approximately 4 million; the Christian minority in Iraq has shrunk from the approximately 1 million before the First Gulf War of 1991 to at least half that number. In Israel, Arabic is an official language of the state and the spoken language some 20% of Israel's Arab population. Various dialects of Judaeo-Arabic are also spoken by Jewish citizens of Israel. These include: Iraqi (100,000); Moroccan (250,000); Tripolitanian (30,000); Tunisian (45,000); Yemeni (50,000). See Raymond G. Gordon, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 15th ed (Dallas: SIL, 2005).

[44] Reuven Snir, "'My Adherence to the Creed of Moses Has Not Diminished My Love for Muhammad's Nation': The Emergence and Demise of Iraqi Jewish Literary Modern Culture", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98 (2008) 62-87, 63.

[45] See R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 84–5, and Snir, "My Adherence to the Creed of Moses", 62.

Arabic, *tarjama*, is cognate with the Hebrew and Aramaic Targum. Polliack points to a number of possible factors behind Saadia's use of the title *Tafsīr* for his translation, rather than *Tarjama*. These include the influence of Islamic conceptions of the uniqueness and inimitability of the Arabic of the Qur'ān and the Karaite usage of the term *tarjama* for their Arabic translations of the Bible.

> By adopting the term *tafsīr*, Saadiah inferred that the Hebrew Bible, like the Qur'ān, is essentially inimitable, and that his task as a translator is not to imitate the Hebrew text in the Arabic tongue, but to decode it within a coherent interpretive system and then re-create it in a new cultural context. He may also have employed this term to distance his Arabic version from the Aramaic Targum, and so silence those within Rabbanite circles who deeply opposed the canonization of one version of the Arabic Bible. In this light, Qirqisānī's specific use of the term *tarjama* and its appearance in other Karaite discussions of Bible translation gains special significance, particularly since it echoes the traditional term *targum* which popularly designated translations amongst Jews.[46]

In his introduction to the *Tafsīr*, Saadia gives us some indication of his motivation for its production. In this passage he alludes to the works that combined translation and exegesis mentioned earlier:

> I only wrote this book because some petitioners asked me to isolate the simple meaning of the Torah text in a separate work, containing nothing of the discussions of language … nor all the questions of the heretics, nor of their refutation; nor of the "branches" of the rational commandments or the mode of performance of the non-rational ones; but extracting the matters of the Torah text alone. And I saw that what I had been requested to do would be advantageous, in order that the audience might hear the matters of the Torah … briefly, and the labour of someone seeking a particular story would not be protracted because of the admixture of demonstrations of every aspect, which would be burdensome … And when I saw this I wrote this book, the *tafsīr* of the simple meaning of the Torah text alone, clarified by knowledge of the intellect and the tradition; and when I was able to add a word or a letter which would make the desired intention clear … I did so.[47]

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[46] Meira 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 CE*, Études sur le judaïsme médiéval, 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 86-7.

[47] The translation is that of Brody, "The Geonim of Babylonia as Biblical Exegetes", 78.

4. Some Examples

Having said something of the historical, religious and linguistic context of Saadia's life and work, let us now try to get a sense of what the *Tafsīr* is like by examining some specific examples from it. We shall look at how Saadia translates the Hebrew word *'Ĕlōhîm* ("God") and the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) into Arabic; how he handles both words in the opening verse of the *Shema* (Dt 6:4); how he translates God's response to Moses at Ex 3:14; how he deals with a number of proper names; and finally how he renders the Hebrew word *Torah* into Arabic.[48]

4.1 God and YHWH

Closely related to the overidentification of Arabic with Islam mentioned above is the popular belief that there is something inherently and exclusively Islamic about the word *Allāh*. The word *Allāh* is often incorrectly understood as the name of the "Muslim God" when it is, quite simply, the Arabic word for *God*. Some contemporary fundamentalist Christian anti-Islamic polemicists assert that the word should not be used to refer to the God of Christianity. Such claims of Muslim exclusivity are not confined to fundamentalist Christians: in 2007, an Indonesian Catholic newspaper – the *Herald* – was prohibited from using the word *Allāh* (an Arabic loanword in Indonesian) to refer to God.[49]

How, then, does Saadia translate the Hebrew words for God and the name of God? Most frequently in the *Tafsīr* he uses the word *Allāh*. Saadia translates the Hebrew *'Ĕlōhîm* ("God") with the Arabic *Allāh* ("God"), and he also frequently translates the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) – the *name* of God – as *Allāh*.[50] When the Tetragrammaton appears alone at Gen 12:1, ("and YHWH said to Abram"), Saadia translates it as "God said to Abram." When the two occur together (*YHWH 'Ĕlōhîm*), such as at Gen 2:4, Saadia translates the two Hebrew words with the single Arabic word *Allāh*. He does occasionally combine *Allāh* with the Arabic word for Lord (*rabb*). If we look at the first verse of the *Shema* (Dt 6:4) we can see such

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[48] All quotations from the *Tafsīr* are from the edition of Joseph Derenbourg, *Œuvres Complètes de R. Saadia ben Iosef al-Fayyoûmî*. Vol. 1, *Version Arabe du Pentateuque* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893).

[49] Upon appeal, the Kuala Lumpur High Court ruled in 2009 that the newspaper's use of the word was legal, but this judgement is itself being challenged. See the judgement of Justice Lau Bee Lan, 31 December 2009 (R1-25-28-2009).

[50] In this regard, Saadia departs from the practice of Targum Onqelos which habitually renders the Hebrew *'Ĕlōhîm* with the name of God, but uses a graphic device which prevents the reader from reading the name aloud.

an instance. Saadia's Arabic rendering of the verse can be translated thus: "Know, People of Israel, that God is our Lord, God the One".

Figure 1: Gen 12:1

HEBREW (MT)

ויאמר יהוה אל אברם

The LORD said to Abram

ARABIC (*Tafsīr*)

קאל אללה אלי אברם

قال الله إلى أبرم

God said to Abram

ARAMAIC (*Targum Onqelos*)

ואמר יוי לאברם

The LORD said to Abram

Figure 2: Dt 6:4

HEBREW (MT)

שמע ישראל יהוה אלוהינו יהוה אחד

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. (NJPS)

ARABIC (*Tafsīr*)

אעלם אל אסראיל אן אללה רבנא אללה אלואחד

أعلم آل إسرائيل أنّ الله ربنا الله الواحد

Know, People of Israel, that God is our Lord, God the One.

These examples clearly indicate a reluctance on Saadia's part to write the actual *name* of God in any way in Arabic. Another interesting example of how Saadia deals with divine names is to be found in his translation of God's enigmatic response to Moses at Ex 3:14. He translates the Hebrew *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* ("I am that I am") with the Arabic *al-Azalī alladhī lā yazūl* ("the Eternal who ends not"). This translation offers an example of Saadia's great skill as a translator. His Arabic rendering manages to echo the verbal repetition of the Hebrew by using two similarly sounding Arabic words, the verb *zāla* and the nominal *azalī*.

Figure 3: Ex 3:14

Hebrew (MT)

ויאמר אלהים אל משה אהיה אשר אהיה ויאמר כה תאמר לבני ישראל אהיה שלחני אליכם

And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'" (NJPS)

Arabic (*Tafsīr*)

קאל לה אלאזלי אלדי לא יזול קאל כדא קל לי אסראיל אלאזלי בעתני אליכם

قال له الأزلي الذي لا يزول قال كذا قل لبني إسرائيل الأزلي بعثني إليكم

He [God] said to him [Moses]: "The Eternal who ends not"; He [further] said: "Say the following to the Children of Israel: 'The Eternal has sent me to you.'"

4.2 Some Personal Names

Saadia does not, as one might expect, leave the names of key figures in the Pentateuch in Hebrew. Instead where Qur'ānic Arabic forms exist, he uses these.

Abraham

The Hebrew *'Avrāhām* is rendered by the Arabic form *Ibrāhīm*. An interesting feature of Saadia's rendering is his fidelity to the Qur'ānic orthography of this name. In the Qur'ān, this name is written *defectiva* – the long *ā* is not written with the usual *alif* between the *rā'* and *hā'* but with the vertical, or "dagger" *alif* above the *rā'*.

Hebrew (MT): אברהם

Arabic (*Tafsīr*): إِبْرَاهِيمُ / אברהים

Isaac

The Hebrew *Yiṣḥāq* is rendered by the Arabic form *Isḥāq*. As with his writing of *Ibrāhīm*, Saadia preserves the *defectiva* orthography of the Qur'ān.

Hebrew (MT): יצחק

Arabic (*Tafsīr*): إِسْحَقُ / אסחק

Jacob

The Hebrew *Yaʿăqōv* is rendered by the Arabic form *Yaʿqūb*.

HEBREW (MT): יעקב

ARABIC (*Tafsīr*): יעקוב / يَعقُوبُ

Israel

The Hebrew *Yiśrāʾēl* is rendered by the Arabic form *Isrāʿīl*.

HEBREW (MT): ישראל

ARABIC (*Tafsīr*): אסראיל / إِسْرَائِيلُ

Moses

      The Hebrew *Mōšeh* is rendered by the Arabic form *Mūsā*. We might also note Saadia's translation of the phrase "Moses the servant of the Lord" as "Moses the Messenger of God" (*Mūsā Rasūl Allāh*) – as at Dt 34:5. We have already commented upon his translation of the Tetragrammaton as *Allāh*; his use here of the phrase *Rasūl Allāh* is most interesting. As already noted, the Qurʾān uses the term *rasūl* to denote the higher-grade of prophets – a group whose number includes Moses. However, the phrase *Rasūl Allāh* is most commonly encountered as the chief designation for the Prophet Muhammad: the *shahāda* (the Islamic declaration of faith) consists of two clauses: *I testify that there is no deity but God* and *Muhammad is the Messenger of God* (*Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*). Even though it is completely within the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy to refer to Moses as <u>a messenger of God</u> – the designation <u>the Messenger of God</u> clearly echoes the second clause of the Islamic profession of faith.[51]

      HEBREW (MT): משה
      ARABIC (*Tafsīr*): מוסי / مُوسَى
      HEBREW (MT): משה עבד יהוה
      ARABIC (*Tafsīr*): מוסי רסול אללה / مُوسَى رسول الله

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[51] This and other related issues are discussed by David Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's *Tafsīr* of the Torah," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 93 (2003) 353-95; on *Rasūl Allāh*, see especially 361-5.

4.3 Torah

As a final example, let us examine how Saadia translates one of the central terms in Judaism: the word *Torah*. As is well-known, the common English translation of Torah as *law*, though not incorrect, is somewhat limiting. *HALOT*, for instance, gives eight major uses of the word, which occurs some fifty-six times in the Pentateuch. Saadia uses three words to translate it in these various occurrences. He renders it using forms of the Arabic word *dalāla* ("guidance") twice. He renders it using the Qur'ānic Arabic word *Tawrāt* twenty times. As with the Arabic names Ibrāhīm and Isḥāq mentioned above, Saadia closely follows the unusual Qur'ānic orthography (*Twryt*) which probably preserves an older pronunciation of the word that Lazarus-Yafeh calls a "crossbreed" between the Hebrew *Torah* and the Aramaic *'Ōraytā'*.[52] The remaining thirty-four occurrences of the word *Torah* are translated by Saadia with the Arabic word *Sharī'a* – making it his most common word for translating *Torah*. Saadia's use of three different Arabic terms to render the Hebrew *Torah* clearly reflects his belief that the Hebrew word has numerous senses. We shall not enter into a detailed analysis of the individual occurrences – however, we shall note that in view of the frequently reductive contemporary translations and understandings of both the *Torah* and the *Sharī'a*, Saadia's use of the latter term to render the former is most illuminating.

5. Conclusion

Saadia tells us himself that his *Tafsīr* was produced due to popular demand from ordinary believers who wanted a translation of the Pentateuch into their day-to-day language: Arabic. The challenge facing him was considerable: it was not simply a matter of translating a text from one language to another – if translation is ever so simple an activity – rather, Saadia was faced with the task of rendering the sacred text of Judaism into a language that had become the vehicle for a new, ever-expanding religion with imperial backing. Many of the words Saadia used had become specialized terms in Islamic discourse. His task could be seen as being both an attempt to Judaize the Arabic language and to Arabize Judaism. The *Tafsīr* was a landmark document: it is the foundational text of a culture and its literature.

We in Ireland are no strangers to the sometimes violent debates about the nature of national, ethnic and religious identity. Simplistic and essentialist formulations of Irish identity have, in the last few decades, been

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[52] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tawrāt", *Encyclopedia of Islam* X, 393.

re-examined, interrogated and sometimes reformulated. There has been a gradual acknowledgement that identity is a complex amalgamation of numerous variables. Facile binary oppositions of "us and them" close us off to the fascinating diversity of our neighbours, both near and far. Engaging with the biblical exegesis of Saadia Gaon allows us an insight into a great mind and his successful negotiation of these complex relationships. It allows us to reflect upon important questions about cultural ownership and the nature of ethnic, linguistic and religious identity. It also offers us a useful key for exploring the relationship between Judaism and Islam – and indeed, Christianity. As the late Norman Calder observed: "The development of an Arabic vocabulary for the expression of concepts and ideas integral to the prophetic religions of the Middle East is perhaps best understood as the common achievement of several communities engaged in polemical encounter throughout the 7th to the 9th centuries A.D."[53]

I would like to conclude by quoting Saadia's translation of the visionary words of the book of Isaiah. In view of the tragic estrangement between Jews and Muslims in the Middle East today, one hopes that the same open and inclusive spirit that animated the translational efforts of an Egyptian-born, Arabic-speaking Jewish resident of Baghdad will translate these words into a just and peaceful reality for all the people of the region:

فيحطمون سيوفهم يجعلها سككا

ومزارقهم مناجلهم

لا يحمل قبيل على اخر سيفا

لا يتعلم أبدا الحرب

And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares
And their spears into pruning hooks:
Nation shall not take up
Sword against nation;
They shall never again know war
(Is 2:4, NJPS).

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[53] Norman Calder, "Sharī'a", *Encyclopedia of Islam* IX, 322.