

MASORAH AND GRAMMAR AS REVEALED IN TENTH CENTURY KARAITE EXEGESIS¹

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Introduction

Yefet ben ʿElī the Karaite lived in Jerusalem where he translated the entire Bible into Judeo-Arabic and wrote a systematic and methodological commentary in that language on the entire Bible. Like Saadiah Gaon, Yefet subscribed to the Arabic model of his time. His commentaries include introductions to each book of the Bible and follow the biblical text in an orderly fashion.² In the course of studying the

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² Compare his method with qurʿānic exegesis known as *tafsīr musalsal* which entails the analysis of all the verses according to their arrangement in a given *sūra*. See Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Theological Approaches to Qurʿanic Exegesis* (London: Routledge, 2012), 2. Much has already been written in modern scholarship on the work of Yefet. It is beyond the scope of this paper to include a detailed description of his exegetical work. However, such studies can be found, among others, in the following: L. Bargès, ed. and trans., *Rabbi Yapheth ben Heli Bassorensis Karaitae in Librum Psalmorum Commentarii arabici* (Paris: Excudebant Firmin Didot Fratres, 1846); idem, *Excerpta ex R. Yapheth ben Heli commentariis in Psalmos*

Davidis regis et prophetæ (Paris, 1846); idem, *Rabbi Yapheth About Aly Ibn-Aly Bassorensis Karaitarum doctoris sapientissimi in Canticum Canticorum commentarium arabicum* (Paris, 1884); D. S. Margoliouth, ed. and trans., *A Commentary of the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1889); Nahum Schorstein, ed., *Der Commentar des Karäers Jepheth ben ʿAli zum Buche Rûth, zum ersten Male nach drei Mss. editert, mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen versehen* (Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1903); Hartwig Hirschfeld, ed., *Jefeth b. Ali's Commentary on Nāḥūm with Introduction, Abridged Translation and Notes* (London: Jews' College, 1911); Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (vol. 2; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1935), 30-32; Philip Birnbaum, ed., *The Arabic Commentary of Yefet Ben ʿAli the Karaite on the Book of Hosea* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1942); Leon Nemoj, *Karaite Anthology: Excerpts from the Early Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), 83-4; Richard Murray Bland, "The Arabic Commentary of Yefet Ben ʿAli on the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapters 1-6" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1966); S. M. Lehrman, "Japheth b. Ali, the Karaite: His Place among Biblical Commentators," in *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie in the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (eds. H. J. Zimmels et al.; London: Jews' College Publications, 1976), 231-42; Georges Vajda, *Deux commentaires karaïtes sur l'Ecclésiaste* (Leiden: Brill, 1971); Moshe Sokolow, "The Commentary of Yefet Ben Ali on Deuteronomy XXXII" (PhD diss., Yeshiva University, 1974); Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Edition and Versions in Yepheth b. Ali's Bible Commentary," *Alei Sefer* 2 (1976), 17-32; idem, "The Doctrines of Religious Thought of Abû Yûsuf Yaʿqûb a-Qirqisânî and Yefet ben ʿElî" (PhD diss., The Hebrew University, 1977); Haidar Abbas Hussain, "Yefet ben ʿAli's Commentary on the Hebrew Text of the Book of Job I-X" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1986); Ofer Livne-Kafri, "The Commentary on Habakkuk (Chapters 1, 3) by the Karaite Yefeth b. ʿElî al-Baṣri", *Sefunot* 21 (1993), 73-113; 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 C.E.* (Études sur le judaïsme médiéval 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997); Joseph Alobaidi, *The Messiah in Isaiah 53, The Commentaries of Saadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yeruham and Yefet ben Eli on Is. 52:13-53:12* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); Ben-Shammai et al., eds., *Judaeo-Arabic Manuscripts in the Firkovitch Collections - Yefet ben ʿEli al-Basri, Commentary on Genesis - A Sample Catalogue* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2000); Polliack and Eliezer Schlossberg, "Yefet ben Eli's Translation of the Book of Obadiah", *Peʿamin* 89 (2002): 61-82; Sagit Butbul,

manuscripts of Yefet's commentary on the Book of Proverbs, many elements of Masorah were encountered. Some of the masoretic elements are marked on the margins and are visually noticeable, while others are found in the content of his commentary. This article explores the elements of Masorah in Yefet's work as well as the ideology behind his masoretic preferences. It links his preferences with the Karaite Zionistic doctrine of return to the Land of Israel, and the Karaite ideological supremacy given to the Tiberian oral recitation tradition of Scripture. Yefet's discussions of lexical and grammatical problems are also explored in this article. They are studied in the context of the early Karaite grammatical tradition. His approach to solving these problems include old strategies as well as new, and is embedded in an innovative linguistic approach to cases of peculiarities.

The Order of the Books

As Yefet's personal codex did not survive, we can only infer the order of its content based on internal evidence. Yefet's comments lead us to believe that he began his exegetical work on Genesis and followed the biblical order throughout his work. His compositions are replete with allusions to the order in which he wrote his commentary, and it suffices to show two pieces of evidence to support this observation. The first is

“The Commentary of Yefet ben ‘Eli the Karaite on the Book of Ruth”, *Sefunot* 23 (2003): 459-571; Daniel Frank, *Search Scripture Well: Karaite Exegesis and the Origins of the Jewish Bible Commentary in the Islamic East* (Études sur le Judaïsme médiéval 29; Leiden: Brill, 2004); Ben-Shammai, “Japheth ben Eli Ha-Levi”, *EJ* 11:86-7; Michael Wechsler, *The Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet Ben ‘Eli the Karaite on the Book of Esther* (Brill: Leiden, 2008); Polliack and Schlossberg, *Yefet ben ‘Eli’s Commentary on Hosea* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009); Joshua A. Sabih, *Jepheth ben Ali’s Book of Jeremiah: A Critical Edition and Linguistic Analysis of the Judaeo-Arabic Translation* (London: Equinox, 2009); Barry Dov Walfish, *Bibliographia Karaitica* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 391-410; Marzena Zawadowska ed., *Arabic Translation and Commentary of Yefet ben ‘Eli the Karaite on the Abraham Narratives (Genesis 11:10-25:18)* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); and Yair Zoran, “The Commentary of the Karaite Japheth ben Eli on the Book of Obadiah: An Annotated Scientific Edition”, *Ginzei Qedem* 8 (2012), 129-195.

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his commentary on Num. 27:11, in which he makes a reference to his not-yet-written commentary on Deut. 21:16:

As for the [fact that the text] discusses sons and not daughters, this is in line with our forthcoming commentary (*‘alā mā saʿašraḥu dālika*) on *then on the day when he wills his possessions to his sons* (Deut. 21:16).³

The second is found in the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Ruth in which he mentions his by then existing commentary on Exodus saying “as we had explained this (*kamā šaraḥnā dālika*) in the chapter *and Jethro heard* (Exod. 18:1).”⁴ Indeed, Yefet wrote his commentary according to a traditional masoretic order of Scripture, yet there is no one standard order determined by the Masoretes. As is well known, the order of the pentateuchal books had been fixed without dispute in antiquity. However, the order of the prophetic and hagiographic books varies in different traditions.⁵ The two main

³ SP Academy of Oriental Studies B365 (f. 106b). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Additional evidence is found in his commentary on Gen. 1:14 where Yefet mentions his intention to compose a book of refutation (*Kitāb al-Radd*). He refers to this book as completed in his commentary on Exod. 35:3. Samuel Poznański, “The Karaite Literary Opponents of Saadiah Gaon in the Tenth Century”, *JQR* 18 (1906), 229.

⁴ The original Arabic text and a translation into Hebrew are found in Butbul, “Ruth”, 482, 522.

⁵ One of the earliest discussions of the order of biblical books is found in a *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. B. Bat. 14b*). According to the *baraita*, the order of the latter prophets is Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah followed by the minor prophets. The order of the Hagiographa, according to the same *baraita*, is Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Chronicles. This order was followed in only a small number of manuscripts. On the different traditions of the order of biblical books see, among others, Israel Yeivin, *Mavo laMasorah haTavranit* (Jerusalem: ha-Universita ha-Ivrit ha-Fakulta la-Mada’e ha-Ruah ha-Hug la-Lašon ha-Ivrit, 1971), 32-33; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2d ed.; Minneapolis,

traditions are the Babylonian and the Palestinian. Therefore, the question is, which tradition did Yefet's codex reflect?⁶

With regard to the prophetic books, the main difference between the Babylonian and the Palestinian traditions is the order of the latter prophets. The order of the three largest books of latter prophets in the Babylonian tradition reflects that which is mentioned in a *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud, namely, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah.⁷ In contrast, the order according to the Palestinian tradition is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. An informative discussion found in Yefet's commentary on Hos. 1:1 explores the order of the prophetic books. Yefet asserts that the order of the prophetic books is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, followed by the twelve minor prophets. He explains his assertion based on chronological considerations.⁸ This order is in agreement with Palestinian as well as Spanish and Italian manuscripts, but differs from Babylonian and Ashkenazic manuscripts.⁹

With regard to the order of the Hagiographa, three matters are in question: the order of the EMeT books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job; the term EMeT originates from the Hebrew initials of these three books in reverse order); the order of the five *maggillot* (the five *maggillot* are Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther); and the position of Chronicles.

Concerning the order of the EMeT books, the Babylonian tradition

Fortress Press, 2001), 3-4; Yosef Ofer, *The Babylonian Masora of the Pentateuch, its Principles and Methods* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2001) (Heb.), 124-6; see also Nahum M. Sarna and S. David Sperling, "Bible, The Canon", *EJ* 3:580-2; and Aron Dotan, "Masorah", *EJ* 13:607.

⁶ Lawrence Marwick had already examined this topic, and some of the points discussed in this article were mentioned by him as well. See Lawrence E. Marwick, "The Order of the Books in Yefet's Bible Codex", *JQR* 33 (1943), 453-4.

⁷ See *supra* note 5. See also Fernando Diaz Esteban, *Sefer 'Oklah Wə-'Oklah* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas Instituto, 1975), XXXIV-XXXVI; Ofer, *Babylonian Masora*, 16; and Mordechai Breuer ed., *The Masora Magna to the Pentateuch by Shemuel ben Ya'aqov (Ms. L^M)* (Jerusalem: The Masora Foundation, 2002), 12, 16-17.

⁸ Polliack and Schlossberg, *Hosea*, 142-5, 261-6. See also Marwick, "Order", 453-4.

⁹ See, among others, Dotan, "Masorah", 607.

arranges them as Psalms, Proverbs, Job. In contrast, according to the Palestinian tradition the order is Psalms, Job, Proverbs. In his commentary on Prov. 30:24 Yefet says:

With regard to the saying *the wisest of the wise*, the intention here is not the kind of human wisdom which is intelligence and assertion, rather it is the kind of wisdom God created for animals, as we have already explained (*wa-qad šaraḥnā dālika*) in the commentary on *but where shall wisdom be found* (Job 28:12).¹⁰

It is clear from this comment that Yefet had completed his commentary on the Book of Job before embarking on Proverbs. This order is in agreement with the Palestinian tradition, in which the Book of Job precedes Proverbs.

The most unstable order of books in the Bible is the order of the five *məgillot*. These texts are not grouped together in the Qumran manuscripts. Some of them are appended to other books in the Septuagint versions and in certain Christian Bibles, where Ruth follows Judges and Lamentations follows Jeremiah. The practice of grouping them together in the Hebrew Bible originates from the custom of reading these books on the festivals. The two most common orders of the five *məgillot* are based either on chronological principles or on the sequence of the holidays in which they are read. The order according to chronology is based on the assumed historical period in which they were written. This order is in agreement with the Palestinian tradition, and it is thus: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther.¹¹ The order based on the sequence of reading the *məgillot* according to the seasons of the year is in agreement with the Babylonian tradition and it is as follows: Song of Songs—read on Passover; Ruth—read on Shavu^cot (Pentecost), Lamentations—read on Ninth of Av, Ecclesiastes—read on Sukkot (Feast of Booths), and Esther—read on Purim. Motivated by the principle of chronology, Yefet discusses the order of the five *məgillot* in his

¹⁰ BL Or. 2553 (127a).

¹¹ They are found in this order in the Leningrad Codex (M^L).

commentary on Ruth 1:2. He asserts that the events mentioned in the Book of Ruth indeed took place in the days of the Judges. However, he continues, the author/redactor (*mudawwin*) kept the story separate from the Book of Judges because the judges themselves are not mentioned in the story.¹² Yefet adds that the biblical *mudawwin* appended the story of Ruth to the other *məgillot* and placed it, according to chronological order, ahead of them, since Boaz preceded Solomon.¹³ Here too Yefet's remarks

¹² The concept of the *mudawwin* in Karaite exegesis is subject to much debate in modern scholarship. Some questions relating to the definition of the role of the *mudawwin* and the scope of his activity have been examined in recent articles. The meaning of the root in classical Arabic entails a wide semantic field which includes the act of composition, recording, and compiling. The Arabic noun *diwān* belongs exclusively to the realm of poetry and usually pertains to a collection of poems or an anthology. The exact meaning of the root in Karaite use is not clear, as it appears to have a wide range of meanings. It seems that in Yefet's commentaries the *mudawwin* may have one of several roles such as the author, the recorder, the redactor, or the narrator. See Polliack, "Karaite Conception of the Biblical Narrator (Mudawwin)", in *Encyclopaedia of Midrash* (vol. 1; eds. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 350-74. See also Polliack and Schlossberg, "Historical-literary, Rhetorical and Redactional Methods of Interpretation in Yefet ben 'Eli's Introduction to Minor Prophets", in *Exegesis and Grammar in Medieval Karaite Texts* (ed. Geoffrey Khan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-40; Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms, From Saadya Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Ramat-Gan, Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982), 86-92; Rina Drory, *The Emergence of Jewish-Arabic Literary Contacts at the Beginning of the Tenth Century* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1988), 114; and Ben-Shammai, "On *Mudawwin*, the Redactor of the Hebrew Bible in Judaeo-Arabic Bible Exegesis", in *From Sages to Savants: Studies Presented to Avraham Grossman* (eds. Joseph R. Hacker et al.; Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2010), 73-110.

¹³ The following is my translation of the original Arabic found in Sagit Butbul, "The Commentary of Yefet ben 'Eli the Karaite on the Book of Ruth", *Sefunot* 23 (2003), 482-3: "We assert that the saying 'In the days when the judges ruled' refers to events that took place in the days of the Judges even if their chronicles are collected in the Book of Judges. The author composed the story of Ruth and Boaz separately since the Judges themselves are not mentioned in the story. He, therefore, appended this scroll to the other scrolls and placed it, according to chronological order, ahead of them since Boaz preceded Solomon."

attest to the Palestinian/chronological order of the *məgillot* in which Ruth is in first position, followed by Song of Songs.¹⁴

A question that remains unanswered is whether Chronicles was found at the beginning of the Hagiographa in Yefet's codex, consistent with the Palestinian tradition, or at the end, following the Babylonian tradition. In light of evidence concerning latter prophets, the position of the EMeT books, and the five *məgillot*, it is reasonable to assume that Chronicles was situated at the head of the Hagiographa in Yefet's codex. However, no evidence to support this has been found as yet. It is important to note that the eleventh-century, Arabic-script manuscript of the British Library, BL Or. 2556, which was owned by a certain Levi Halevi – presumably Yefet's son – contains segments of the translation and commentary of Yefet on Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles in this order, reflecting the Babylonian order. However, since each of the commentaries in this manuscript begins in a separate folio, independent of the others, it is possible that initially they were separate, or perhaps bound according to the Palestinian sequence, and that the present order is a result of a later rebinding. Nonetheless, cumulative internal evidence suggests that Yefet's codex was arranged according to the Palestinian order.¹⁵ It is not surprising that Yefet's codex follows the Palestinian tradition. One of the central tenets in Karaite doctrine was the call for immigration to Israel, as early Karaites believed that settlement in Jerusalem would hasten the arrival of the Messiah. Daniel al-Qūmisī was the first influential Karaite leader who endorsed and promoted the immigration of Karaites to Palestine. His call resulted in the eventual establishment of a Karaite community of scholars in Jerusalem. In addition to theological motivation, Zionistic ideology in Karaite doctrine is coupled with their anti-Rabbanite sentiments. Soon after the Muslims took hold of Jerusalem in 638, Jews were given permission to settle in the city. However, opening the gates of Jerusalem to Jews did not stir much interest among the Rabbanite leadership of the diaspora. The Babylonian

¹⁴ See also Marwick, "Order", 456-9.

¹⁵ Based on his own examination Marwick reaches a similar conclusion. See Marwick, "Order", 459-460.

academies did not support immigration to Palestine throughout the gaonic period. Instead, they emphasized their own superiority over the Palestinian academy. Thus Babylonia remained the preferred center of Rabbanite Judaism, while Jerusalem became the center for Karaite Judaism during the golden age of the movement.¹⁶ Yefet himself was a passionate adherent of this ideology, as can be seen in the following examples. In his commentary on Song 2:12-13 Yefet writes:

Just as the sages of Palestine are more revered than those of the Exile in their knowledge, so too all those who dwell in Palestine are more respected in their observance of religion than those living in Exile.¹⁷

In his commentary on Mic 12:13 he writes:

The land of Exile is jail, and the prisoners have been imprisoned for a long time in that jail, which has no exit door nor an opening for climbing out.¹⁸

Pisqa'ot

The Masoretes divided the biblical text into small segments, generally larger than one verse but smaller than one chapter, known as *pisqa'ot* or *paršiyot*.¹⁹ Such divisions are found in the manuscripts of Yefet's

¹⁶ For the Zionistic ideology of the Karaites see, *inter alia*, Moshe Gil, "The Origin of the Karaites", in *Karaite Judaism* (ed. Meira Polliack; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 73-118; Yoram Erder, *The Karaite Mourners of Zion and the Qumran Scrolls* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), 33-115; idem., "The Mourners of Zion: The Karaites in Jerusalem in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries", in *Karaite Judaism* (ed. Meira Polliack; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 213-35.

¹⁷ As quoted in Erder, "Karaites in Jerusalem", 217.

¹⁸ As quoted in Erder, "The Negation of the Exile in the Messianic Doctrine of the Karaite Mourners of Zion", *HUCA* 68 (1997), 122.

¹⁹ The Masoretes specify two types of *pisqa'ot/paršiyot*: one is open (*pətuḥah*) and the other is closed (*sətumah*). The division into *pisqa'ot* in Prov. 1-9 in the Leningrad Codex (M^L) and the Aleppo Codex (M^A) includes only open (*pətuḥah*)

commentaries. The question is whether the division found in these manuscripts reflects the masoretic division. No autographic manuscript penned by Yefet has been found thus far. However, the earliest copies of his work are dated to the eleventh century, around a hundred years after he composed his commentary.²⁰ The eleventh-century manuscripts are different from subsequent ones, as the former are written in Arabic script, while the latter are written in Hebrew script.²¹ Arabic-script manuscripts

breaks. Cambridge University, Add. Ms. 1753 (M^Y) uniquely includes two closed (*sətumah*) divisions. See list in BHQ, 12*-13*. On the masoretic tradition of dividing the text see, among others, Christian David Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (repr.; New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1966), 9-24; Charles Perrot, “Petuhot et setumot: Étude sur les alinéas du Pentateuque”, *RB* 76 (1969), 50-91; Yeivin, *Mavo*, 34-5; Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 50-53; and Dotan, “Masorah”, 607.

²⁰ While it is known that Yefet lived and wrote his commentaries in the second half of the tenth century, neither the exact date of his birth nor the date of his death are known. However, from the writings of Sahl b. Maṣliāḥ it is evident that it was only after the death of Saadia (942) that Yefet wrote a refutation of the former’s anti-Karaite writings. (Mann, *Texts and Studies*, 30-32; Wechsler, *Arabic Translation*, 3-11; Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 788-90). Yet, the tribute *ayyadahu Allāh* (may God support him) attached to his name on a manuscript written in 1004/5 implies that he was still alive in the first decade of the eleventh century (Reihart Hoerning, *British Museum Karaite MSS. Descriptions and Collation of Six Karaite Manuscripts of Portions of the Hebrew Bible in Arabic Characters* (London: British Museum, 1889), 21). Likewise, the tribute *yəḥayyehu ha-el və-yišmərehu* (may God sustain and preserve him) attached to his name in the *Book of Precepts* written by his son Levi b. Yefet in 1006/7 suggests that he was still alive then. See also S. Pinsker, *Lickute Kadmoniot* (Vienna, 1860), 87-89 and Ben-Shammai, “*Mahadura və-nušḥa’ot mi-peruše Yefet ben ‘Eli la-miqra*”, *Alei Sefer* 2 (1976), 17-32.

²¹ Modern scholars addressed the question of why a large proportion of early Karaite manuscripts were written in Arabic script. Qirqisānī’s personal view, which does not reflect the view of other Karaites of his time, is that no script has unique value or holiness. Rather it is the content which matters and not the form. See Ben-Shammai, “Hebrew in Arabic Script — Qirqisānī’s View”, in *Studies in Judaica, Karaitica and Islamica Presented to Leon Nemoy on His Eightieth*

typically do not include marginal notes. In contrast, Hebrew-script manuscripts include occasional notes on the margins which indicate various masoretic elements. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Yefet did not include these notes in his original manuscripts, and that they were the product of later copyists.

Most of the Hebrew-script manuscripts of Yefet's commentary include markings of *pisqa'ot* on the margins. They are marked alphabetically by large Hebrew letters with a small crescent-moon-shaped symbol above them. Comparing the division of Prov. 1-9 on the margins of Yefet's manuscripts with that in M^L, it was found that out of the 24 breaks in M^L,

Birthday (eds., S. R. Brunswick and R. Sheldon; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1982), 115-126. The following is a collation of modern attempts to address the question of Arabic script. Samuel Poznański postulated that the Karaites were more versed in Arabic script than Hebrew; Hirschfeld suggested that their motivation was to keep their writings from Rabbanite readers; Abba Bendavid says that Arabic script served the Karaites to better reflect the Hebrew vowel system; Dotan and Paul B. Fenton assume that Karaites deemed Hebrew script too holy for the purpose of study; Geoffrey Khan proposes that the Karaite transcriptions of the Bible into Arabic were a result of their conflicts with the Rabbanites. He suggests that the Karaites sought to represent the oral recitation tradition, to reflect vowel length, spirant and plosive modes of the *bgdkpt*, and other aspects of the Tiberian pronunciation tradition, in a direct and systematic fashion. Their transcriptions were written in a predominantly *plene* spelling and they reflected only the oral recitation even in cases of discrepancy between the oral and the written traditions. See Khan, *Karaite Bible Manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-21; idem, "The Medieval Karaite Transcriptions of Hebrew into Arabic Script", *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992), 157-176; idem, "The Orthography of Karaite Hebrew Bible Manuscripts in Arabic Transcription", *JSS* 38/1 (1993), 49-70; idem, "The Contribution of the Karaites to the Study of the Hebrew Language", in *Karaite Judaism* (ed. Meira Polliack; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 310-314. See also Abba Bendavid, "Minnayin HaḤaluqa LiTnu'ot Gədolot U-Kṭannot?" *Ləšonenu* 22 (1957-58), 7-35. Further discussion can be found in Joshua Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: A Study of the Origins of Middle-Arabic* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute; 1981), 38-44; Leon Nemoy, "The Factor of Script in the Textual Criticism of Judeo-Arabic Manuscripts", *JQR* 66 (1976), 148-159; and Blau and Simon Hopkins, "Ancient Bible Translations to Judaeo-Arabic", *Pe'amim* 83 (2000), 4-14.

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23 are identical to those on Yefet's manuscripts (96% agreement).²² Hence, there is a relatively high degree of agreement between the marginal markings on Yefet's manuscripts and the masoretic division of the text into *pisqa'ot*. However, as mentioned before, the marginal notes were made by later copyists, not by Yefet. The next question is, therefore, whether Yefet follows the same breaks in the text when he inserts segments of commentary. When we examine Yefet's commentary we see that he often provides a running translation of a group of verses, at the end of which he includes a paragraph of commentary.²³ He breaks the text up into small units in light of the subject matter, but so do the Masoretes. The question is, therefore, whether there is a correlation between the division of the Masoretes and that of Yefet. Comparing Yefet's units of commentary on Prov. 1-9 with the masoretic division of the text in M^L, 21 out of a total of 24 masoretic divisions were identical (88% agreement).²⁴ Based on this evidence, it is tempting to conclude that Yefet was guided by the masoretic division when he crafted his exegetical units. However, a close examination of his commentary on other books reveals a much weaker correlation between his division of the text and the masoretic division into *pisqa'ot*.²⁵

The masoretic division of Scripture is found also in manuscripts containing the work of Abū al-Faraj Hārūn, Yefet's younger contemporary and a Karaite grammarian and teacher who lived in

²² Yefet's manuscripts include two additional breaks in the text missing in M^L: one of them (5:1) is found in the Aleppo Codex (M^A) and in the Cambridge University, Add. Ms. 1753 (M^Y). See BHQ, 12*. In addition there is one break in M^L missing in that of Yefet.

²³ About this system see Polliack, "Major Trends in Karaite Biblical Exegesis in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries", in *Karaite Judaism* (ed. Meira Polliack; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 364-5.

²⁴ Yefet missed only 3 masoretic divisions but added 9 of his own, not included in the masoretic division as reflected in M^L.

²⁵ In the Book of Esther 13 out of the 23 total masoretic divisions were found in Yefet's work (57% agreement). He missed 10, yet added 6 breaks in the text not found in the masoretic division. For the breaks in Yefet's text see Wechsler, *Arabic Translation*, 5*-60*.

Jerusalem. Abū al-Faraj Hārūn compiled an interpretation of selected difficult words from the Bible in a book titled *Tafsīr al-Alfāz al-Šaʿba fī al-Miqra* (*The Meaning of Difficult Terms in the Bible*). This compilation is organized according to the biblical order of books, and according to the division into *pisqaʿot*. The order is reflected in the page layout of the manuscripts.²⁶

Other Marginal Notes

In addition to the division into *pisqaʿot*, some of Yefet’s manuscripts include other marginal notes of various kinds. Such markings include the phrase *haši hassefer* which indicates the midpoint of the book with regard to verse count. In addition, in some of the manuscripts, including Yefet’s commentary on Proverbs, there is a set of markings which indicate the division into *sədarim*.²⁷ The division into *sədarim* is Palestinian in origin. It reflects a triennial cycle of the ritual Torah reading in which the Pentateuch is divided into 154 (or, according to another tradition, 167) weekly units called *sədarim*.²⁸ Typically, the markings on Yefet’s commentaries look like a large decorated Hebrew letter *sameḥ* in the margin. Sometimes it is followed by another letter, written underneath it, which indicates the number of the *sefer*. For example, Prov. 14:4 is the beginning of the fourth *sefer* in Proverbs, as it is indicated by the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *daleṭ*. Even though the division into *sədarim* is Palestinian in origin, it was retained

²⁶ In some of these manuscripts the initial words of a new biblical *pisqaʿ* are written in the middle of a new line, or in large characters. In some cases a new book and a new *pisqaʿ* are introduced by an ornamental marking on the margin of the word *sefer*, or *parš* respectively. See Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, “The Explanation of Difficult Words by ʿAbū al-Faraj Hārūn ibn al-Faraj”, in *Exegesis and Grammar in Medieval Karaite Texts* (ed. Geoffrey Khan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 186-7. Like the manuscripts of Yefet’s work, it is possible that the page layout of these manuscripts was the product of later copyists.

²⁷ The division into *sədarim* in Yefet’s manuscripts is identical to the division found in the masoretic text in M^L, M^A and to a lesser degree also M^Y. See discussion in BHQ, 12*-13*.

²⁸ See Dotan, “Masorah”, 607.

in manuscripts long after the Babylonian division into 54 annual *parašot* became the prevailing custom in Palestine as well. Divisions into *sədarim* are common in biblical books that are used for ritual readings before the congregation such as the Pentateuch. It is not clear why we find such divisions in the Book of Proverbs, as we do not know of communal/ritual readings of this text.²⁹ Even if we assume that there existed a tradition of public recitation of the Book of Proverbs, Yefet's manuscripts are compositions of commentary; they are not biblical codices written by Masoretes in order to preserve the Masorah such as M^L, M^A and others. The question is, therefore, why did the copyists add marginal notes that point to the midpoint of the book, the division of the text into *pisqaʔot*, and the division of the text into *sədarim*? It stands to reason that the copyists deemed such marking necessary in order to help the readers navigate and orient themselves. Since no alternative text divisions were in use at the time, and since there is no evidence for systematic pagination on these manuscripts, it is possible to assume that these divisions were used not only for the purpose of public reading and studying, but also for the purpose of individual navigation and orientation.³⁰

²⁹ Yosef Ofer suggests that the division into *sədarim* in non-liturgical books served the purpose of periodical reading and studying of the text. On the tradition of the division of non-liturgical text see Ofer, "The Masoretic Division (*Sedarim*) in the Books of the Prophets and Hagiographa", *Tarbiz* 58 (1989), 155-89. See also Yeivin, *Mavo*, 33-4.

³⁰ Chapter division of the biblical text was not used at that time, as it was introduced by Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century in Europe. On Langton's work see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952; repr., Notre Dame; University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), 221-24; Dominique Barthélemy, "Les traditions anciennes de division du texte biblique de la Torah", in *Selon Les Septante: Trente études sur la Bible grecque des Septante en hommage à Marguerite Harl* (ed. G. Dorival and O. Munnich; Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1995), 34-5. See also David Marcus, "Differences between Chapter Divisions and the Parshiyot: The Case of Vaʔera (Exodus 6:2)", in *Essays in Education and Judaism in Honor of Joseph S. Lukinsky* (ed. B. I. Cohen and A. A. Ofek; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2002), 382-5;

The Hermeneutic Value of Tropes

Medieval manuscripts of Yefet's commentaries do not include marking of the trope system. What is more, Yefet does not commonly comment on the trope system in his exegetical work. An unusual case in which Yefet harnesses the trope system for the purpose of hermeneutics is found in his commentary on Esth. 9:7-9. These verses include the list of names of Haman's sons. The names are separated from one another by the particle *et*, which is repeated ten times. Each *et* is followed by the cantillation sign *paseq*. Yefet explains that the *paseq* is there to represent the family and servants of each one of Haman's sons, who were killed along with the sons themselves.³¹ Yefet undeniably adds a hermeneutic value to a trope, which is typically intended as a punctuation mark. Such comments are rare in Yefet's exegetical work; nevertheless, they betray a homiletic approach to interpretation.³²

and Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 52. See references there. On the relationship between the masoretic division of the text into *pisqa'ot* and *sedarim* and chapter division see Marcus, "Alternate Chapter Divisions in the Pentateuch in the Light of the Masoretic Sections", *Hebrew Studies* 44 (2003), 119-28.

³¹ Wechsler, *Arabic Translation*, 294: "The reason, moreover, for setting a *pāsēq* after each *’et* is that each one of Haman's sons had a family and servants who were therefore connected with (the fate of) each one of Haman's sons." Using the trope system for hermeneutic purposes was not uncommon in antiquity nor in the Middle Ages. One such use is found in *Ex. Rab.* 2:6, a comment on Exod 3:4. The translation is taken from Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *The Midrash Rabbah* (vol. 2; Jerusalem: The Soncino Press, 1977), 56: "And He said Moses, Moses. You will find that when the text writes Abraham, Abraham (Gen. 22:2), there is a division between the two names; Jacob, Jacob (*ibid.*, 46:2), there is a division; Samuel, Samuel (1Sam. 3:10), there is a division; but in the case of Moses, there is no division. Why is this? It is like the case of a man who was carrying a heavy burden and called out: 'Here So-and-so, So-and-so, come nigh and take off this load from me.' Another explanation: With the other prophets, God broke off his discourse, but with Moses He never broke off His discourse."

³² The hermeneutic value of *paseq* was also pointed out by the Masoretes of M^L who comment in the Masorah Magna on 1 Chr. 1:24 *Shem | Arpachshad* "Why are the accents on this phrase different from the others? To indicate that Shem was a

Kativ/Qere

The biblical text is preserved in two parallel traditions, the written tradition, also known as *kativ*, and the oral recitation tradition also known as *qere*. Each of these traditions includes exclusive information missing in the other. For example, the written tradition distinguishes between *plene* and defective orthography, as certain words may or may not include vowel letters. It also preserves the tradition of linear writing and spacing characteristic of the separation between *pisqa'ot*. All these features are not included in the oral recitation tradition. On the other hand, the written tradition does not include vowels, gemination, cantillation and punctuation information, all of which is preserved in the oral recitation tradition. The Masoretes were aware of these two channels of transmission and were determined to record the discrepancies between them. The largest category of masoretic notes is the one that marks the discrepancy between the written tradition and the oral recitation tradition. The Masoretes recorded roughly 1500 cases of such discrepancies.³³ These cases are not uniform in nature; rather they include several different types. The purpose of some of the masoretic notes was to guide the reader and warn against following the written tradition when it deviated from the oral. They were also designed to alert the scribe to errors due to unusual spellings. The Masoretes often point to the

priest.” About this note and other hermeneutic values of the *paseq* see Lea Himmelfarb, “The Exegetical Role of the Paseq”, *Sef* 58:2 (1998), 243-60. My gratitude to David Marcus for this reference. For more on the hermeneutic value of the trope system see Miles B. Cohen, “Masoretic Accents as a Biblical Commentary”, *JANES* 4,1 (1972): 2-11. See also Simcha Kogut, *Correlations between Biblical Accentuation and Traditional Jewish Exegesis* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1996).

³³ Ofer, “*Kativ* and *Qere*: The Phenomenon, Its Notation, and Its Reflection in Early Rabbinic Literature”, *Lěšonénu* 70 (2008), 57-58, 64. About *kativ/qere* see also Robert Gordis, *The Biblical Text in the Making* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, 1937).

<http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/12-2013/Sasson.pdf>

exceptional cases, those that seem at odds with the norm.³⁴ Karaite scholars generally preferred the oral tradition to the written. They posited that while the oral tradition was transmitted uninterrupted through the generations by a large number of readers, the written tradition was in the hands of a relatively small and exclusive class of scribes. Any typographical error made by one scribe could potentially be introduced into a transmission line and remain fixed, whereas a mistake in recitation would be more likely to be checked and corrected. The Karaites considered the Tiberian oral recitation tradition as the gold standard. The medieval treatise *Guidance of the Reader (Hidāyat al-Qāri)*, attributed to Abū al-Faraj Hārūn, attests to the canonic status of the Tiberian reading tradition.³⁵ The Karaites believed that the Tiberian tradition preserved the original reading of the Bible as was practised in the days of the prophets.

³⁴ Michael Riffaterre (1924-2006), a contemporary literary critic and structuralist theorist, asserts that neologisms always attract attention as they seem to contrast with the context. Whether a new word, a new meaning, or a shift from one grammatical category to another, new coinings interfere with the automatism of perception and compel the reader to become aware of the form. Although Riffaterre did not intend to describe the work of the Masoretes, but rather modern scholars, his words ring true with regard to ancient Masoretes too when he writes, “It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars have concerned themselves almost exclusively with studying the unusualness. Most think they have explained a neologism when they have described the differences that oppose it to its context, or, one might say, its ungrammaticality within the textual idiolect.” Michael Riffaterre, *Text Production* (trans. Terese Lyons; New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 62. My gratitude to Meira Polliack for this reference.

³⁵ Ilan Eldar, *The Study of the Art of Correct Reading as Reflected in the Medieval Treatise Hidāyat al-Qāri* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1994). On the Karaite polemics against the Rabbanites in their preference of the *kāre* tradition and rejection of the *kātiv* see Ya^cqūb al-Qirqisānī, *Kitāb al-Anwār wal-Marāqib* (vol. 1; ed. Leon Nemoy; New Haven: Yale University Library, 1939), 136-41; and Pinsker, *Lickute*, 102-3. On the preference of the Tiberian oral recitation to the written tradition by the Karaites see Khan, *Bible Manuscripts*, 20-21; idem, “The Medieval Tradition of Hebrew Grammar,” in *The Foundations of Arabic Linguistics* (ed. Amal Elesha Marogy; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 221; and Drory, *Emergence*, 137-49. Olszowy-Schlanger notes that most readings in Abū al-Faraj Hārūn’s *Tafsīr al-ʿAlfāz* follow the Tiberian system. See Olszowy-Schlanger, “Explanation”, 187.

Their preference for the Tiberian tradition is consistent with their Zionistic doctrine that emphasized the supremacy of the Land of Israel. Rejection of the *kativ* tradition by Karaites was part of their criticism of the Rabbanite tradition of harnessing the conflict between the oral and written traditions to derive multiple interpretations from Scripture. Their accusation that the Rabbanites corrupted the transmission of the text echoes the idea of *tahrif* (tampering with the text, textual corruption), a major polemic topic in internal Islamic debate as well as in Muslim polemics against Jews and Christians.³⁶

Although Yefet was neither a Masorete nor a scribe, but rather an exegete, we find some reference to masoretic notes in his commentary. In general, Yefet ignores *kativ/qare* notes; however, a certain type of *kativ/qare* prods him to weave his commentary in its light. Yefet's description of *kativ* as "that which is written inside" and *qare* as "that which is written outside" testifies to the page arrangement of the codices that were at his disposal. It reflects the convention of writing the *kativ* in the body of the text and *qare* in the margin, which was already a common practice in his time.³⁷ Be that as it may, one such occurrence is found in Prov. 26:2, translated by NRSV as *Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, an undeserved curse goes nowhere*. Yefet's rendition is: *Like a bird in its wandering and like a sparrow in its flight, so too an undeserved curse does not come*. This is a case of two homophones, two words of identical pronunciation but different spellings and meanings. In such a case the discrepancy between the oral recitation tradition and the written tradition is not manifested by a different utterance, but rather, by the different meaning. The penultimate word in this verse according to the *kativ* is *lo*³, "no", a negation particle. Variably, it is *lo*, "his", according to the *qare*. A survey of the different masoretic lists yields a total of nineteen such instances in the entire Bible, typically annotated as *lo dehtiv lo*³ ("his" written as "no").³⁸ Remarkably, Yefet's

³⁶ Khan, *Bible Manuscripts*, 20-21.

³⁷ About the convention of writing the *kativ* in the body of the text and the *qare* on the margin see, among others, Ofer, "Kativ", 55-6.

³⁸ According to the Mm of M^L there are seventeen occurrences: Exod. 21:8; Lev.

translation of Prov 26:2 reflects only the *kativ*. Yet he combines both *kativ* and *qare* into one complementary commentary, saying that an undeserved curse *will not* come upon the one who is cursed; rather it will bounce back on the curser himself and *will be his*.³⁹

It is interesting to note that like Yefet, Saadiah's translation of this verse reflects the *kativ* only. Furthermore, his commentary is reminiscent of Yefet's, as he too suggests an interpretation that combines the two meanings in light of both the *kativ* and the *qare*.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, this is a

11:21; Lev. 25:30; 1Sam. 2:3; 2Sam. 16:18; 2Kgs. 8:10; Isa. 9:2; Isa. 49:5; Isa. 63:9; Ps. 100:3; Ps. 139:16; Job 13:15; Job 41:4; Prov. 19:7; Prov. 26:2; Ezra 4:2; and 1Chr. 11:20. See Gérard E. Weil, *Massorah Gedolah* (vol. 1; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 2001), 210. The Mm of manuscript L^M documents fifteen cases: Exod. 21:8; Lev. 11:21; Lev. 25:30; 1 Sam. 2:3; 2 Sam. 16:18; 2 Kgs. 8:10; Isa. 9:2; Isa. 31:8; Isa. 49:5; Isa. 63:9; Ps. 100:3; Job 6:21; Job 13:15; Ezra 4:2; and 1 Chr. 11:20. About the masoretic annotation *lo dehtiv lo*² see Breuer, *Masora Magna*, 467-9. For a brief discussion of some of the cases of 'his' written as 'no' see Abraham A. Lieberman, "lo²/lo: An Analysis of A Ketib - Qere Phenomenon", in *VIII International Congress of the International Organization for Masoretic Studies: Chicago 1988* (ed., E. J. Revell; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 79-86. For a detailed study see Bruno Ognibeni, *Tradizioni orali di lettura e testo ebraico della Bibbia: Studio dei diciassette ketiv lo²/qere lo* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1989). My gratitude to Elvira Matin Contreras for the last two references.

³⁹ The following is the translation of the Arabic text found in British Library Or. 2507 (f. 91b-92a): "This is a description of a bird fleeing from its nest in order to eat. It will settle nowhere but in its own nest. Similarly, an undeserved curse one casts on another, while the other has not sinned towards him and did not commit any act that calls for the curse, will not adhere to him. Rather it will bounce back on the one who cursed, just as the bird settles nowhere other than its own nest. The intention of writing *lo² tavo²* (will not come) inside and *lo tavo²* (will come upon him) outside is that it (the curse) will not come upon (*lo² tavo²*) the one who is cursed, rather it will come upon (*lo tavo²*) the one who curses."

⁴⁰ See Saadiah Gaon, *Mišle im Targum Uferuš HaGaon Rabbenu Saadiah Ben Yosef Fayyumi zs"l* (ed. and trans. Yoseph Qāfiḥ; Jerusalem: Ha-Va'ad le-Hoṣa'at Sifrei Rasag, 1976), 209. In a fragmentary commentary on Exod. 21:8, which is one of the cases of *lo dehtiv lo*², found in Yehuda Ratzaby's collection, Saadiah points to the two variants *lo*² 'no,' and *lo* 'his,' and suggests two interpretations. However, the fragment is missing some of the commentary. See Yehuda Ratzaby

rare case in which Yefet acknowledges the two traditions of *kətiv* and *qəre* and composes an interpretation that combines the two.⁴¹

Lexicography

In their pursuit of the meaning of unusual forms and unique words in Scripture, medieval lexicographers typically used a method that included searching through three concentric spheres of resources. In cases of unique words or unique usages of words, they would begin by looking for the meaning in the context itself. If this was not productive, they would expand the sphere of their search to include intertextual studies, and they would look for the meaning in cross references within Scripture in which the form occurs. However, if this too was not successful, they would resort to extra-biblical material. Sometimes the last sphere would include the application of comparative semitics, as they would search for cognates in other semitic languages that were at their disposal such as Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic.⁴² For the purpose of the discussion at hand, I

ed., *Rav Saadya's Commentary on Exodus* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1998), 110-11. Ibn Ezra, in his commentary on Exod 21:8, quotes Saadiyah who compares the case at hand with Ps. 100:3, another case of *lo dehtiv lo*. According to Ibn Ezra, Saadiyah concludes that the *qəre* version is the right one in his eyes, adding that in all cases of *lo dehtiv lo* the *qəre* is to be followed. Ibn Ezra further quotes the medieval grammarian Yehuda Ibn Ḥayyuj saying that it is not possible in such cases to distinguish the pronunciation between the *kətiv* and the *qəre*. Like Saadiyah, Ibn Ḥayyuj also concludes saying that the *qəre* is the right version. See Mordekhai L. Katsenelenbogen, ed. *Sefer Shemot* (vol. 4 of *Torat Ḥayyim: Ḥamiša ḥumšei Torah in haftarot*; ed. Mordekhai L. Katsenelenbogen; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986), 11-12.

⁴¹ The only other case of *lo dehtiv lo* in the Book of Proverbs is found in Prov. 19:7. In this case Yefet composes a multi-layered interpretation according to the different readings. However, here too, his interpretations of the different readings are not mutually exclusive; rather, they complement one another.

⁴² Dotan asserts that despite the common belief that comparative linguistics began in the nineteenth century, it is evident that such techniques were used already by Jewish grammarians of the Middle Ages about a thousand years earlier. Dotan,

therefore call this technique ‘the concentric search method’.⁴³ This method was widely used by medieval Qurʾan exegetes and grammarians as well. The three spheres of quranic studies included context, cross references within the Qurʾan, and comparison with *Ḥadīṭ*, foreign sources, and even pre-Islamic poetry.⁴⁴ Following the footsteps of their medieval predecessors, modern scholars continue to use such linguistic methods even today. The following is a collection of cases in which Yefet points to lexical difficulties in Scripture and offers his own solutions, which include the concentric search method.

Contextual Meaning

A literal approach to translation is the hallmark of the Karaite tradition. Yefet’s translations often echo the source language and imitate it on lexical and syntactic levels. The following is a case in which Yefet deviates from this practice and provides an interpretive translation based on context instead of the literal meaning.

Song 2:17α is part of the discourse of the female beloved: *ʿad še-yyafuah ha-yyom vā-nasu ha-ṣṣālalim (Before the day blows softly in, and the shadows flee)*.⁴⁵ This clause poses a few interpretive problems. The

“Linguistics and Comparative Linguistics in the Middle Ages: An Analysis of One Verbal Pattern in Judah Ḥaaūj’s Grammar”, in *Studies in Hebrew Language in Memory of Eliezer Rubinstein* (eds. Aron Dotan and Abraham Tal; Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1995), 117-130.

⁴³ Meira Polliack discusses a similar method used by Yefet in his identification and treatment of gaps (*iḥtiṣār*) in Scripture. She asserts that Yefet’s technique of filling in the gaps includes three realms: contextual, canonical and extra-canonical. See Polliack, “‘The Unseen Joints of the Text’: On the Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Concept of Elision (*IḤTIṢĀR*) and its Gap-Filling Functions in Biblical Interpretation”, in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit* (eds. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 179-205.

⁴⁴ See Abdul-Raof, *Theological*, 10-27. See also discussion in Walid A Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafṣīr Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 132-3.

⁴⁵ The translation is taken from Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 112.

main problem is whether the beloved refers to dusk or to dawn. What does it mean that the day blows? Does it refer to the cool air in the evening or to the morning breeze? What does it mean that the shadows flee? Is it when they disappear as the sun rises or is it the evening darkness that swallows them up? Michael Fox posits that the time of the day described here is dawn.⁴⁶ Yefet holds the same view. Yet surprisingly, his translation of the first verb *yafuah* as *yunkašifu* ‘will be revealed,’ is interpretive, not literal. Yefet, self aware of the deviation, adds an explanatory clause saying: “I have translated *yafuah* as *yunkašifu* as it is befitting the clause and its meanings; however the pure meaning of the word is ‘to blow’.”⁴⁷ Yefet invites the reader to share in his conflict when faced with a biblical clause that does not make sense. On the one hand, he knows that the intrinsic logic of the Hebrew language does not allow a clause such as ‘the day blows.’ On the other hand, he feels compelled to preserve the literal meaning. His solution is therefore to give an interpretive translation, but include the literal meaning as well in his commentary.⁴⁸ Yefet’s interpretive translation, which is based on context, demonstrates the use of the first step of the concentric search method.

Multiple Meanings

In Prov. 21:21 *rodef šadaqa va-ḥesed yimša³ ḥayyim šadaqa və-ḥavod* the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 115. See also a discussion in J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 131-3. For more on this debate and other difficulties in the verse see Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 408-11.

⁴⁷ For the Arabic text see Bargès, *Canticum*, 37.

⁴⁸ Yefet’s methodology of pointing to the tension between the literal meaning and the contextual meaning is seen in the works of other Karaites of his time. See, for example, Abū al-Faraj Hārūn’s treatise *Diqduq*, in which he uses similar terminology used by Yefet. Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 134-6. See discussion in the following section on grammar.

word *ṣadaqa* occurs twice, once in each hemistich. Some modern scholars assume that the second repetition is a dittography. They suggest translating the verse without the second occurrence. For example, the rendition found in NRSV is *whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life and honor*.⁴⁹ In contrast, medieval commentators, including Yefet, never assume anything in Scripture to be superfluous. Rather, they make attempts to justify the repetition. In the case at hand Yefet maintains that the repetition of the word *ṣadaqa* points to two different meanings. He asserts that the first *ṣadaqa* means ‘following the law’, ‘being pious’, while the second occurrence means ‘reward’. The first meaning Yefet suggests is rather common, but the second is not. Yefet further supports the second meaning with two cross references in Scripture (Deut. 6:25 and Gen. 15:6) in which this rare meaning can be demonstrated.⁵⁰ This is a case in which Yefet applies the second step of the concentric search method, i.e., intertextuality. To be sure, modern scholars agree with Yefet that *ṣadaqa* can sometimes mean ‘reward’,⁵¹ yet none has linked it to the verse at hand.

Hapax Legomena

Yefet, like other Karaite scholars of his time, exhibited a vast knowledge of the biblical text and an impressive understanding of biblical Hebrew. He was also versed in other semitic languages such as Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic. When faced with lexical difficulties, Yefet would occasionally harness this knowledge to resolve them.

In his commentary on Song 4:1-4 Yefet examines key words in the

⁴⁹ See also Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009), 688-9.

⁵⁰ Translation of British Library Or. 2553 (f. 95b): “The meaning of the first [occurrence of] *ṣadaqa* is ‘[observance of] the law’, and the meaning of the second [occurrence of] *ṣadaqa* is ‘reward’. It is similar to *u-ṣadaqa tihye llanu* (*it will be therefore our merit*) (Deut. 6: 25), and *va-yyahšaveha llo ṣadaqa* (*he reckoned it to his merit*) (Gen. 15:6).”

⁵¹ A clear case in which *ṣadaqa* means ‘reward’ is Ps. 24:5. See Fox, *Proverbs*, 689. See references there. Surprisingly, this meaning has not been mentioned in KB. See KB, 1006.

segment and points to the existence of a few hapax legomena, saying: “Know that there are words in this segment which have no parallel in Scripture such as *u-midbareḥ nave* and *še-ggalšū mehar ha-gil^cad* [sic].” He then offers an explanation for both cases saying:

The sages explained *u-midbareḥ* as ‘and your organ of speech’, (*wa-miḥṭabuki*), since this is whence the speech emerges.⁵² They explained *še-ggalšū* as ‘they were goaded on to move from their place.’ Another meaning is that perhaps it is derived from the Aramaic translation of *bə-qaraḥto o və-gabbaḥto* (*his bald head or his bald forehead*, Lev. 13:42).⁵³

With regard to the first hapax, *midbareḥ*, Yefet’s translation is in agreement with LXX and the Vulgate as he understands it as ‘mouth’ rather than ‘speech’. Yefet is aware of the poetic parallelism which infers that it is the instrument itself, the organ of speech, not the action of speaking. He therefore draws the meaning from context itself, resorting to the first step of the concentric search method.

David ben Abraham al-Fāsī, a tenth century Karaite lexicographer, includes *midbareḥ* in his lexicon *Kitāb Jāmi^c al-Alfāz*. He lists it within the entry for the root *d-b-r*, but does not offer a translation.⁵⁴ His Spanish contemporary, Abū al-Walīd Merwān Ibn Janāḥ, lists the quotation *u-midbareḥ nave* in his lexicon *Sepher Haschoraschim* as an example of the root *d-b-r* coupled with a preformative *mēm*, but gives no translation.⁵⁵ Like Yefet, later commentators such as Rashi and Ibn Ezra

⁵² See Joshua Blau, *A Dictionary of Medieval Judaeo-Arabic Texts* (Jerusalem: The Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2006), 185.

⁵³ See the Arabic text in Bargès, *Canticum*, 54.

⁵⁴ Al-Fāsī lists it under the bilateral section d-b, within the trilateral subgroup d-b-r, saying that this particular word is derived in the same form as *mispar*. David Ben Abraham al-Fāsī, *Kitāb Jāmi^c al-Alfāz* (vol. 1; ed. Solomon L. Skoss; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936), 364. On al-Fāsī’s exegetical method see Esther Gamliel-Barak, “The Karaite David Ben Abraham Al-Fāsī’s Commentary Methods on the Bible According to his Dictionary” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2010).

⁵⁵ Abulwalīd Merwān Ibn Ganāḥ, *Sepher Haschoraschim* (ed. Wilhelm Bacher;

also understood it as the organ of speech.⁵⁶

With regard to the second hapax that he mentions, *še-ggalšu*, the meaning remains unclear even today. This root occurs only twice in the Bible, here and in Song 6:5. In both occurrences the word is used in the description of the physical beauty of the beloved, more specifically her hair. In the KB the root g-l-š is compared with cognate roots in Galilean Jewish Aramaic ‘to boil’, Middle Hebrew ‘boiling water’, Ugaritic and Egyptian ‘to hop’, Arabic ‘to sit down’, and Ethiopian ‘to go away’.⁵⁷ The version in the LXX may reflect a translation of a variant, *še-ggillu*, derived from the root g-l-y meaning ‘to uncover, reveal’.⁵⁸ The Vulgate and Syriac seem to reflect *še-^calu* derived from the root ^c-l-y ‘to ascend’.⁵⁹ Yefet suggests that the root means ‘to goad’ as in goading an animal to move from its place. Yefet does not give an explanation for his choice; perhaps he is guided by context here too. Yet, he provides additional interpretation according to which the root is related to the Aramaic translation of *gabbahat*. To be sure, *gabbahat* occurs several times in the Bible, mostly in the discussion of leprosy and the balding of the head and forehead as a result of the disease. *Gabbahat*, therefore, means the balding of the forehead. It usually appears in the Targum as *gəlušta*². Yefet suggests, therefore, that here too the root might have a meaning related to baldness or hair loss. Looking for the solution in another semitic language, Yefet demonstrates the use of the third step of the concentric research method.

Applying the same method, other ancient and medieval commentators also coupled our hapax with baldness. R. Joshua of Sikhnin explains in the name of R. Levi that the root at hand relates to the thinning of the hair.⁶⁰ Al-Fāsi, who includes the word in his lexicon, says that he

trans. Jehuda Ibn Tibbon; Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969), 104.

⁵⁶ For a further discussion of this hapax see Pope, *Song*, 463.

⁵⁷ KB, vol. 1, 195.

⁵⁸ *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* (trans. Sir Launcelot Lee Brenton; London: Samuel Bagster and Sons Limited, 1794), 833.

⁵⁹ For the Vulgate see *Psalms, Books of Wisdom, Canticle of Canticles* (trans. Francis Patrick Kenrick; Baltimore: Lucas Brothers, 1857), 392. Pešitta: ‘that ascend from the Gilead mountain.’

⁶⁰ Jacob Neusner, *Song of Songs Rabbah: An Analytical Translation* (vol. 2;

believes that it is derived from the Syriac word for *gibbeah*, and therefore it means ‘to shear’.⁶¹ In the same vein, Rashi posits that the word means ‘make bald’. Ibn Ezra and Rashbam posit that the word means ‘to be seen’. However, they both also mention that the root g-l-š is used in the translation of *gibbeah*.⁶² In contrast, Ibn Janah posits that the root g-l-š means ‘to get up early, at dawn’. He suggests that it is a cognate of the Arabic root ġ-l-s, ‘dawn’.⁶³ Modern translators such as Marvin Pope and Michael Fox prefer ‘streaming’. Variably, Cheryl Exum’s rendition is ‘winding down’.⁶⁴

Another lexical crux is found in Exod. 4:1:

Va-yya^can Moše va-yyomer və-hen lo³ ya³aminu li və-lo³ yišmə^cu bə-qoli ki yomru lo³ nir³a eleħa Adonai (But Moses spoke up and said, “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The Lord did not appear to you?”).

The Hebrew demonstrative *hen* most commonly means ‘look’ or ‘behold’. It is also a pronoun meaning ‘they’ (feminine). However, these meanings are not applicable in the verse at hand. A third meaning, the conditional ‘if’, is based on the Aramaic cognate *hen*. Yefet alerts the readers that in the case at hand the third meaning is the appropriate one saying:

Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 24.

⁶¹ Al-Fāsī brings another anonymous opinion according to which the *l* in *še-ggalšu* is superfluous like in the case of *šal^aanan və-šalev* (Job 21:23), and thus, should be read as *še-ggašu*. However, he does not agree with this interpretation. Al-Fāsī, *Jāmi^c*, vol. 1, 328.

⁶² For Rashi and Ibn Ezra on Song 4:1 see Daniel Biton ed., *Mikra³ot Gədolot HaMa³or: Nəvi³im u-Ĥətuvim: Ĥameš Məgillot* (Jerusalem: HaMaor, 2001), 64-5. See also Sara Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on The Song of Songs* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2008), 256.

⁶³ Ibn Ganāh, *Haschoraschim*, 94.

⁶⁴ Fox, *Egyptian*, 127, 129; Exum, *Song*, 151, 153. See a detailed discussion in Pope, *Song*, 458-61.

The word *və-hen* is in place of *və-im*, for this better fits the context. We find this use in the Aramaic instead of *im* as [in] the phrases *və-hen laʔ yadiʕa le-heve* (*but if not (be it known)*) (Dan. 3:18), and *hen qiryata dah titbane* (*if this city will be built*) (Ezra 4:13, 16). And there are many such cases in Aramaic.⁶⁵

Yefet applies here all three steps of the concentric search method. This is a case in which the most common meaning of a word does not fit its context. Yefet's solution combines both searching for a sound meaning in another semitic language, and looking for support in cross references within Scripture.

Grammar & Syntax

Yefet himself was neither a Masorete nor a grammarian, yet he was well familiar with the works of Masoretes and grammarians as his work reflects great knowledge of both disciplines. Scholars have long debated whether the Masoretes were Karaites or Rabbanites. Aron Dotan concludes at the end of his study of the history of the controversy that Ben Asher was indeed a Rabbanite.⁶⁶ In contrast, Rafael Zer goes as far as to say that the Masorete of the Aleppo codex was actually a Karaite.⁶⁷ In the same vein, Geoffrey Khan points to a great affinity between the work of the Masoretes and the work of the Karaite grammarians.⁶⁸ Be that as it may, early medieval Masoretes and grammarians regarded Masorah and grammar as one discipline and discussed them both interchangeably in their writings. They viewed both Masorah and grammar as complementary tools geared towards the preservation of the holy text.⁶⁹ Even though the approach of each discipline is distinctively

⁶⁵ SP RNL EVR I 0054 (f. 65b-66a).

⁶⁶ Aron Dotan, *Ben Asher's Creed: A Study of the History of the Controversy* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977).

⁶⁷ Rafael Isaac (Singer) Zer, "Was the Masorete of the Aleppo Codex of Rabbanite or Karaite Origin?" *Sefunot* 23 (2003), 573- 87.

⁶⁸ Khan, *The Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought in its Classical Form* (vol 1; Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxi-xxiii.

⁶⁹ Dotan, "Masorah", 612.

different from the other, they both work towards the same goal. While the grammarian is looking for the general rules and principles by which the language operates, the Masorete is interested in recording the exceptions, the peculiarities, and the irregularities.⁷⁰ However, since no clear distinction between the two disciplines was made by the early Masoretes and grammarians, this article includes the discussion of both as found in the work of Yefet.

It is not surprising to find discussions of both Masorah and grammar in Yefet's commentaries. Yefet lived and worked in Jerusalem around the time of the great Karaite grammarian Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Nūḥ, who is accredited with founding an academy (*dār*) for learning in Jerusalem. Ibn Nūḥ, who wrote a work in Arabic on Hebrew grammar titled *Diqduq* or *Nuqat Diqduq* (*Points of Grammar*), was himself a link in a chain of tradition of Hebrew grammarians that originated among the Karaites of Iraq and Iran. As Karaites began to migrate from the east to Jerusalem during the tenth century, they brought this tradition with them. Ibn Nūḥ himself moved from Iraq to Palestine, where he is said to have lived for thirty years. Although the *Diqduq* is the earliest extant text identifiable as a Karaite grammatical work, ibn Nūḥ was not the first Karaite grammarian. Both he and other grammarians of his generation refer in their writings to other anonymous Karaite scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) and grammarians (*al-diqduqiyyūna*), some contemporary, but some who passed away before them. Al-Qirḳisānī, a Karaite scholar who wrote in the first half of the tenth century, mentions Hebrew grammarians from Iṣfahān, Tustār and Baṣra in his book, *Kitāb al-Anwār wa-l-Marāqib*.⁷¹ It is likely that Yefet, whose family originated in Baṣra, was trained and influenced by the Baṣran school of Hebrew grammar.

Ibn Nūḥ's *Diqduq* is not arranged systematically according to topics in grammar. Rather, it is a collation of grammatical notes on the Bible, accompanied by occasional exegetical observations. The work discusses selected verses from the entire Bible arranged according to the biblical

⁷⁰ Dotan, "From Masora to Grammar — The Beginnings of Grammatical Thought in Hebrew", *Lěšonénu* 54 (1990), 155-68. See *supra* note 34.

⁷¹ Khan, *Classical Form*, xi-xxi, xxxvii.

text. It is intended as an aid to reading Scripture. For the most part the *Diqduq* is concerned with the analysis and clarification of word structure. It also includes occasional discussions of phonology, syntax and the rhetorical structure of verses.⁷² Yefet's grammatical notes, embedded in his commentaries, bear great resemblance to ibn Nūḥ's method and approach.

Khan shows that ibn Nūḥ's work as presented in the *Diqduq* is closely associated with the activity of the Masoretes. Like the Masoretes, he too examined the details of the written transmission and the reading tradition of the biblical text. Similar to other masoretic works, the *Diqduq*'s main concern is to draw up rules for the occurrence of distinctions.⁷³ In addition, a shared terminology of grammatical concepts was used in masoretic treatises and the work of early Karaite grammarians.⁷⁴ There is an obvious resemblance to ibn Nūḥ's work in Yefet's commentaries. The latter's discussions of grammar are not collected in an organized grammatical treatise; rather they appear as deemed needed according to occurrences of unusual forms in the biblical text. What is more, Yefet uses some of the same terminology found in ibn Nūḥ's work as well as

⁷² Ibid., xvi.

⁷³ Ibid., xxi-xxii.

⁷⁴ An early text of a list of grammatical terms was found in four copies in the Geniza. Nehemiah Allony, who published the list, attributes it to the Karaite tradition. The list includes terms in Hebrew only. It includes terms used for masorah studies, trope, vocalization, grammar and other disciplines. According to Allony the list reflects a Karaite ideology. His designation is based, *inter alia*, on the fact that the list places great emphasis on *qiyās* (analogy), the reference to *ba^cale miqra* (a term used as a reference to Karaites, but also to the Masoretes), and takes no notice of rabbinic literature. Nahamiah Allony, "Rešimat munaḥim Karait me-ha-me³a ha-šminit", in *Sefer Korngrin* (eds., Asher Wieser and B. Z. Luria; Tel-Aviv: ha-ḥevra le-ḥeker ha-mikra be-yisrael, 1964), 324-63. See also Khan, *Classical Form*, xxii-xxiv. For a discussion of the early lists of Hebrew grammatical terminology and their affinity to parallel terminology generated by Arab grammarians see Rafi Talmon, "A Reappraisal of the List of Ancient Hebrew Terms and the Affiliation between Hebrew and Arabic", in *Ever and Arav* (vol. 1; ed., Yosef Tobi; Tel-Aviv: Afikim Publishers, 1998), 27-51. For more on Karaite grammatical terminology see Nadia Vidro, "Karaite Hebrew Grammatical Terminology", *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (in print).

other lists of terms attributed to early Karaite grammarians.

Karaite Hebrew grammarians continued to produce and create through the tenth and eleventh centuries. Ibn Nūḥ's distinguished disciple and successor, Abū al-Faraj Hārūn ibn al-Faraj, a contemporary of Levi ben Yefet (Yefet's son) at the academy, bequeathed to future generations numerous works in Arabic on Hebrew grammar such as his eight-part work on Hebrew morphology and syntax titled *al-Kitāb al-Muštamil ʿalā al-uṣūl wa-l-fuṣūl fī al-luġa al-ʿibrāniyya* (*The Comprehensive Book of General Principles and Particular Rules of the Hebrew Language*), completed in 1026 C.E. This book also appeared in an abridged form titled *al-Kitāb al-Kāfī fī al-luġa al-ʿibrāniyya* (*The Sufficient Book on the Hebrew Language*). Abū al-Faraj's most important contribution to the understanding of the pronunciation and cantillation of the Tiberian masoretic tradition of biblical Hebrew is his aforementioned book titled *Hidāyat al-Qārī* (*Guide for the Reader*).⁷⁵

Yefet's discussions of grammar and syntax display a vast knowledge of grammar theory. He proves to be well versed in the jargon of the grammarians of his time as his discussions are replete with conventional Hebrew and Arabic terminology. As will be pointed out, the same terminology is found in Abū al-Faraj's *al-Kitāb al-Kāfī* as well as other anonymous lists of Hebrew grammar terms.⁷⁶

Single Voice versus Plural Voice

As mentioned above, Yefet exhibits a great knowledge of biblical

⁷⁵ Khan, *Classical Form*, xi-xiv.

⁷⁶ It is important to note that Yefet's shared terminology with that found in Abū al-Faraj's work and the anonymous lists mentioned above is not limited to grammar terminology, but also includes hermeneutic terminology such as *muqaddam wa-mu'aḥḥar* (early and late), *iḥtiṣār* (ellipsis), *muḍmir* (hidden), *ittisāʿ* (expansion of meaning), and *taḥṣīṣ* (specification). For a discussion of these and other hermeneutic terms and their use in Yefet's commentary see Ilana Sasson, "Methods and Approach in Yefet Ben ʿElī Al-Baṣrī's Translation and Commentary on the Book of Proverbs" (PhD diss., The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 160-250. See also Polliack, "Unseen Joints", 179-205.

Hebrew, grammar and Masorah. However, ultimately he is a commentator, not a grammarian. Occasionally, when he points to a grammatical difficulty, his solution is hermeneutic rather than scientific. The following is an example of such a case. In Song 1:16, 17 the female beloved addresses her male lover while referring to herself in the plural. Yefet makes a note of this discrepancy, especially in light of the previous verse, in which the male lover addresses the beloved in the singular. First, Yefet explains the grammatical incongruity. He then brings other examples of the plural voice in places where the singular voice would have been in order. However, he does not offer a grammatical solution. Instead, he uses this as a hermeneutic opportunity. Before delving into his solution, however, we need to examine Yefet's hermeneutic approach to Song of Songs. Yefet's commentary on Song of Songs runs in two parallel strands. The first is a purely literal one, accounting for the love between a man and a woman. The second is allegorical, referring to the relationship between the People of Israel in general and the Karaite community in particular on the one hand, and God on the other. In this case, alluding to the allegorical plane, Yefet posits that the author employs the plural voice when referring to the entire nation, and the singular voice when referring to an exclusive class of the nobles.⁷⁷

To denote the notion of singular voice and plural voice Yefet uses the Hebrew terms *lašon yaḥid* and *lašon rabbim* respectively. In using these terms Yefet adheres to the early Karaite grammar tradition. The use of the Hebrew word *lašon/lašon* to denote a lexical class is found in Abū al-Faraj's work. These and other Hebrew terms are survivals of Hebrew terms that were used by the early Karaite grammarians.⁷⁸ The designation of *yaḥid* as singular and *rabbim* as plural is found in a tenth-century

⁷⁷ The following is the translation of the Arabic text found in Bargès, *Canticum*, 21: "Know that this book is written in *lašon yaḥid* (singular voice) in its entirety except for special cases. Thus he (the author) already said 'we will run after you, we will extol your love more than wine' (Song 1:4). And here 'our couch, the beams of our house'. Likewise, in the following 'we have a little sister' (Song 8:8). It is possible that when he points to the entire nation his composition is in *lašon rabbim* (plural), and when he points to the nobles his composition is in *lašon yaḥid* (singular)."

⁷⁸ See Khan, *Classical Form*, xxxix.

Judeo-Arabic anonymous Karaite grammatical treatise on Hebrew nouns. The grammatical theories expressed in the treatise are close to those of ibn Nūḥ's *Diqduq*.⁷⁹ A list of terms found in the Geniza and dated to the eighth century includes the use of *lašon/ləšon* to denote a lexical class such as *lašon zaḥar/ləšon neqeva* (masculine voice/feminine voice).⁸⁰

Feminine Voice versus Masculine Voice

The following is an example in which Yefet identifies a grammatical difficulty that he resolves by means of both grammar and hermeneutics. In Josh. 2:17, 20 we find the unusual form *hišba^ctānū*. The antecedent of the verb *hišba^ctānū* is Rahab, the woman who dwells in the walls of Jericho. It should, therefore, be derived in the feminine voice as *hišba^ctīnū*. Yefet explains that while forms with *šērē* (*nuqtain*) and *ḥîreq* (*nuqta*) are exclusively feminine (*ta³nīt*), the forms with *qāmeš* (*qamiša*) can be either masculine (*muḏakkar*) or feminine (*mu³annaṭ*).⁸¹ It is interesting to note that the *Gezenius' Hebrew Grammar* is in partial agreement with Yefet, as it indicates that the form *hišba^ctānū* is regarded as a normal second singular feminine declension of the verb when modified by the first person plural suffix.⁸² The third and last occurrence of the form *hišba^ctānū* in the Bible is in Song 5:9, and here too the

⁷⁹ Khan, *Early Karaite Grammatical Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 175-240.

⁸⁰ See Allony, "Reshimat munaḥim". See also Talmon, "Reappraisal".

⁸¹ The following is the translation of the text found in the library of The Jewish Theological Seminary MS 5561 (f. 8b): "It is said about *hišba^ctānū* that it is instead of *hašb^rīnu* [sic], and so is *att yelid^tānū* (Jer 2:27). However, here we have a *qāmeš* (*qamiša*). Forms with *šērē* (*nuqtain*) and *ḥîreq* (*nuqta*) are the same and indicate feminine voice (*ta³nīt*) only. The *qāmeš* (*qamiša*) can be used both in masculine (*muḏakkar*) and feminine (*mu³annaṭ*) forms."

⁸² According to the *Gezenius' Hebrew Grammar*, forms with a short *ḥîreq* such as *rimmītinī* (ISam. 19:17) are considered defective, and forms with *šērē* such as *hōradtēnū* (Josh. 2:18) are considered abnormal. See E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley eds., *Gezenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), § 59 h.

antecedent is feminine. Yefet distinguishes between this occurrence and those found in Joshua. In contrast to his analysis of the cases in Joshua, he identifies the occurrence in Song of Songs as an exclusively masculine form. However, he says that in cases of metaphor – a category to which Song of Songs no doubt belongs in his mind – when no specific male is mentioned, it is permissible to use either the masculine or feminine voice.⁸³

Thus, Yefet identifies two separate yet identical occurrences of a breach in the laws of grammar. His explanations in the different occurrences seem to contradict each other. However, Yefet is an exegete whose role, as he sees it, is to understand grammatical phenomena and justify them, not write them off as errors. Yefet's approach is similar to that of modern functional linguistics. His grammatical notes are descriptive, not prescriptive. For him, biblical Hebrew is a living

⁸³ The following is the translation of the Arabic text found in Bargès, *Canticum*, 76: “*hišba^ctānū* (you thus adjure us) is *lašon zaḥar* (grammatically masculine), and so is the word of the spies to Rahab *nəqiyim anaḥnu mi-ššəvu^cateh [ha-zze] ašer hišba^ctānū* (we will be released from this oath that you made us swear to you) (Josh. 2:17). However, the saying here *še-kkaḥa hišba^ctānū* (that you thus adjure us) is different as every description written by way of metaphor (*wašf tamīl*) may be either in *lašon zaḥar* (masculine voice) or *lašon neqeva* (feminine voice), as long as no explicit male is mentioned.” Yefet includes a few more examples of such discrepancies, all found in the Book of Jeremiah: Jer. :35, 4:30 and 30:15. In a related case, in which there is a discrepancy between the grammatical gender of listed items and the grammatical gender of the number that counts them (Exod. 21: 10-11), Yefet suggests a modification in the grammatical law of agreement. His suggestion is based on the egalitarian principle of *qiyās*. For a detailed description of this case see Sasson, “Gender Equality in Yefet ben ‘Elī’s Commentary and Karaite Halakhah”, *AJSR* 37:1 (2013), 51-74. It is interesting to note that a discussion of *hišba^ctānū* was found in a Geniza fragment of an early Karaite grammatical text written in Persian by an anonymous grammarian. The author of this composition suggests that *hišba^ctānū* is in fact a noun with a pronominal suffix. He explains that when the suffix is removed, the form becomes *hišbā^cāt*, a derivative of *hišbā^cā*. In his translation of *hišba^ctānū*, therefore, he highlights the nominal aspect of the form suggesting ‘the giving to us of an oath.’ Khan, *Grammatical Texts*, 276-7, 314.

language which is not always bound by hard and fast rules.⁸⁴

In his discussion of the verb *hišba^ctānū* Yefet mostly uses Arabic grammar terminology. His terminology is very similar to that found in Abū al-Faraj's *al-Kitāb al-Kāfī*.⁸⁵ Such terminology is used in the mainstream Baṣran school of Arabic grammar. It links Yefet with both the Baṣran and the Karaite grammar traditions.

Active Voice versus Passive Voice

To be fair, Yefet mostly resolves syntactical conundrums in a scholastic fashion. There are many occasions on which he points to a problem or a phenomenon without attributing to it a hermeneutic value. Such is the case with the following example. In his commentary on Song 1:11 Yefet points to a rare case in which the same verb can be understood both as active and as passive voice. Yefet translates *tore zahav na^case laḥ^cim nəquddot^c ha-kkasef* in the active voice as *Golden crowns we will make for you with silver studs*. In addition, he identifies the verb *na^case* as *lašon gədula* (majestic plural). However, he notes that it can be understood also as *maf^cūl* (passive voice), as this is a rare case in which the passive voice and the active voice have the same morphology. Yefet underscores that both readings may fit the context, as it may also be possible to render *Golden crowns will be made for you with silver studs*.⁸⁶

Notice that Yefet combines here both Hebrew and Arabic terminology. He uses the Hebrew term *lašon gədula* to denote the active voice of a

⁸⁴ For this approach in modern linguistics see, *inter alia*, John Lyons, *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 47-54, and Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman, *An Introduction to Language* (5th ed.; Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 13-17.

⁸⁵ Khan, *Classical Form*, xxxix-xlvi.

⁸⁶ The following is the translation of the Arabic text found in Bargès, *Canticum*, 17: “The phrase *na^case laḥ^c* (we will make for you) seems to be in *lašon gədula* (majestic plural, lit: large language), similarly to *na^case adam* (let us make man) (Gen. 1:26). It is also possible to interpret it in *maf^cūl* (passive voice) similarly to *va-ašer haya ne^case la-yom eḥad* (now that which was prepared for one day) (Neh. 5:18).”

majestic plural and the Arabic term *mafʿūl* to denote passive voice. The use of the term *lašon gādula* to denote the majestic plural is unique to Yefet. However, the use of *lašon/lašon* to point to a lexical class is common.⁸⁷ So too, the term *mafʿūl* is widely used in Arabic grammars by both Arab and Karaite grammarians to denote the passive voice, as well as various types of verbal complements.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Elements of both Masorah and grammar as revealed in Yefet's commentaries are presented in this article. Some of the masoretic elements are marked on the margins of the manuscripts and are the product of later copyists, while others are integral to the commentary and were penned by Yefet himself. Based on internal evidence, it seems that the book order in Yefet's codex followed the Palestinian tradition. This evidence goes hand in hand with the Karaite Zionistic doctrine that called for immigration to the Land of Israel, and upheld the supremacy of its tradition. By the same token, Karaite ideology called for the rejection of the Rabbanite tradition which was associated with the Exile. In addition to clues concerning the order of books in Yefet's codex, several types of marginal notes are commonly marked on his manuscripts. The marking of *pisqaʾot* exhibits an extensive degree of agreement with the standard masoretic division as found in M^L. Marginal markings of the midpoint, *pisqaʾot* and *sədarim* were introduced by later copyists and were intended to facilitate the navigation and orientation of the readers. Yefet's own division of the text into exegetical units partially mirrors that of the Masoretes.

Rare as it may be, Yefet attributes a hermeneutic value to the *paseq*, a marker of the trope system, which serves as a punctuation sign. Such

⁸⁷ See discussion above. For a discussion of *lašon gādula* see Yair Zoran, "The Majestic Plural [Pluralis majestatis]—the Plural of Respect", *Beit Mikra Quarterly* 143 (1995): 402-403. Zoran maintains that Yefet was the first to use this term. He points out that Saadia, in contrast, uses the common term in Arabic for 'plural' when pointing to the majestic plural. It is interesting to point out that Ibn Ezra uses the term *lašon gādula*. Zoran suggests that perhaps he was influenced by Yefet.

⁸⁸ See Khan, *Classical Form*, xlii-xliii.

initiative reveals a homiletic approach to exegesis.

Yefet's stance on *kativ/qare* reflects the general Karaite position of insistent preference for the *qare* version, which reflects the oral recitation tradition. Karaites follow the Tiberian reading tradition and consider it the gold standard. However, in cases in which the discrepancy between the *kativ* and the *qare* is a matter of meaning, not pronunciation, Yefet acknowledges the different traditions. Yet, unlike the Rabbanite tradition that draws multiple interpretations based on the differences between *kativ* and *qare*, Yefet combines the two meanings into one complementary commentary.

Treating lexical difficulties, Yefet applies the concentric search method, a method that was innovative in the Middle Ages but proved to survive the test of time and is in use even today.

In his treatment of grammatical conundrums Yefet demonstrates a tight link with the Karaite grammatical tradition. His use of terminology both in Hebrew and Arabic links him to early and contemporary Karaite grammatical tradition as well as to the Baṣran Arab grammar tradition. Yefet's approach to solving grammatical problems combines both hermeneutic and scholastic methods. The latter stems from the understanding of grammar as a science. Such understanding, which was new in Yefet's time, led to the development of methods still in use today. In addition, Yefet's approach to solving grammatical problems resembles that of modern functional linguists. Both Yefet and modern scholarship take a descriptive, non-judgmental, stance on grammar. Such methods and approach point to a unique and innovative world view and place Yefet ahead of his time.