THE MEDIEVAL KARAITE TRADITION OF HEBREW GRAMMAR

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RESUMEN: El Prof. Khan hace una presentación global y valorativa del conocimiento que la investigación moderna ha conseguido de la labor filológica de los caraítas en el campo de la lengua hebrea, en tres áreas fundamentales: gramática, lexicografía y lectura de la Biblia. Los siglos álgidos de la gramática caraíta son los siglos X y XI, decayendo a partir del siglo XII. Los dos gramáticos hebreos caraítas más importantes son Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf Ibn Nûḥ (segunda mitad del siglo X) y Abû l-Faraj Hârûn ibn Faraj (primera mitad del siglo XI), ambos residentes en Jerusalén, pero de procedencia oriental (Iraq/Irán), de donde trajeron a Palestina las tradiciones gramaticales caraítas. La gramática caraíta conecta con la masora y una y otra se complementan, aunque la primera centra su interés en la clarificación del texto hebreo bíblico. En Abû l-Faraj se constata ya el interesamiento por la lengua en sí *misma (per se)*. Los textos caraítas, sobre todo las versiones de *Hidâyat al-qâri'* y las transcripciones árabes del texto bíblico han contribuido notablemente a un mejor conocimiento de la pronunciación tiberiense.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gramática hebrea, caraísmo, exégesis bíblica medieval, lexicografía hebrea.

ABSTRACT: The Prof. Khan makes a global presentation of the knowledge that the modern investigation has obtained about the philological activity of the Karaites in the field of the Hebrew language, in three fundamental areas: grammar, lexicography and reading of the Bible. The algid centuries of the Karaite Hebrew grammar are the Xth and XIth centuries, decaying from the 12th century onward. The two Hebrew Karaite grammarians more important are Abû Ya´qûb Yûsuf Ibn Nûḥ (second half of the Xth century) and Abû l-Faraj Hârûn ibn Faraj (first half of the XIth century), both resident in Jerusalem, but of eastern origin (Iraq/Iran), from where they brought to Palestine the grammatical Karaite traditions. The Karaite grammar connects with the Masora and each one complements the other one, though the first centers its interest in the interpretation of the biblical Hebrew text. In Abu l-Faraj is verified already the interest for the language in it self (*per se*). The Karaite texts, above all the versions of *Hidâyat al-qâri'* and the Arabic transcriptions of the biblical text have contributed notably to a better knowledge of the Tiberian pronunciation.

In recent years, important advances have been made in our knowledge concerning the contribution of the medieval Karaites to the study of the Hebrew language. This has been largely due to the discovery and investigation of a range of new manuscript sources. A large number of these sources are in the Firkovitch collections of manuscripts that are in the posssession of the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg. These collections were acquired in the nineteenth century by the famous Karaite bibliophile Abraham Firkovitch (1787-1874) but have only been made fully available to international scholarship in the last few years. The manuscripts relating to the linguistic activities of the Karaites are found mainly in the so called second Firkovitch collection, which was acquired by Firkovitch in the Near East between the years 1863 and 1865. It consists of more than 15,000 items, including Hebrew, Arabic, Judaeo-Arabic and Samaritan manuscripts. The majority of the collection appears to have originated from the Karaite synagogue in Cairo[1]. Some important manuscript sources relating to this field have been preserved also in other collections, especially those of the British Library in London, and in the Cairo Genizah.

In this paper I shall present a summary of our current knowledge of the field. It should be pointed out, however, that research is progressing quickly and the field is at present in a very dynamic state. New sources are still being discovered and several research projects that are running at the time of writing are currently revealing many new aspects of the texts.

I divide the material here into three main groups that are labelled 'grammar', 'lexicography' and 'biblical reading'. All of these disciplines were closed related[2].

GRAMMAR

The key figures in the history of Karaite grammatical thought whose works have come down to us from the Middle Ages are Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf ibn Nûḥ and Abû al-Faraj Hârûn ibn Faraj. These two scholars belonged to the Karaite community of Jerusalem.

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[1] For the background of the acquisition of the second Firkovitch collection see Harviainen (1991), (1996a) and (1998 n.7).

[2] Some earlier surveys of one or more of these disciplines include Khan (1999a, 1999b), Olszowy-Schlanger (1999).

YÛSUF IBN NÛḤ AND THE EARLY KARAITE GRAMMATICAL TRADITION

Ibn Nûḥ's work is datable to the second half of the tenth century. The surviving works that are explicitly attributed to him in the colophons all have the form of Biblical commentaries. These include commentaries that are primarily exegetical in nature, a commentary that is concerned primarily with translation and a grammatical commentary[3].

Ibn Nûḥ was heir to a tradition of Hebrew grammar that had developed among the Karaites of Iraq and Iran. This was brought to Jerusalem in the migrations of Karaites from the East during the tenth century. Ibn Nûh himself was an immigrant from Iraq. I shall refer to this grammatical tradition as the early Karaite tradition of Hebrew grammatical thought. Abû al-Faraj Hârûn continued some of the elements of this tradition, but was innovative in many ways, both in method and content.

During most of his adult life Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf ibn Nûḥ (known in Hebrew as Joseph ben Noaḥ) resided in Palestine. According to Ibn al-Hârûn, who wrote a chronicle of Karaite scholars, he had a college (*dâr li-l-'ilm*) in Jerusalem, which appears to have been established around the end of the tenth century.[4] He was one of the foremost Karaite scholars of his age. One source includes Ibn Nûh in a list of scholars whom it describes as the "teachers of Jerusalem"[5]. He is referred to in the colophon of another manuscript as "the prince Joseph" (*ha-śar Yosef*)[6].

One Hebrew grammatical text that is attributed to Yûsuf Ibn Nûḥ is extant. This work is referred to in the colophons either simply as the *Diqduq* or as *Nukat Diqduq* "Points of Grammar"[7]. In what follows I shall refer to it by its shorter title. It is written in Arabic, though much of the technical terminology is Hebrew. Abû al-Faraj Hârûn mentions the work in his writings[8].

Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf ibn Nûḥ is likely to be identical with Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf ibn Bakhtawaih (or Bakhtawi) who is mentioned in some sources. Bakhtawaih may have been the Iranian equivalent of the name Nûḥ or Noaḥ (cf. Persian *bakht* "fortune, prosperity"). Yûsuf ibn Bakhtawaih is stated to have been a grammarian who composed a book called *al-Diqduq*. There are references to the *ḥaṣer* ("compound") of Ibn Bakhta-

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[3] For further details see Khan (2000a, introduction).

[4] For the text of Ibn al-Hîtî see G. Margoliouth (1897: 433, 438-39). Ibn al-Hîtî was writing in the fifteenth century. For the background of Ibn Nûh's college, see J. Mann (1935: 33-34).

[5] Mann (1935: 31). The other scholars in the list are his contemporaries Yefet ben 'Eli and Abû al-Surrî ibn Zuṭa.

[6] MS II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 1754, fol. 105a.

[7] A critical edition of Ibn Nûh *Diqduq* to the Hagiographa with an analysis of its content is presented in Khan (2000a).

[8] Cf. W. Bacher (1895a: 251) and S. L. Skoss (1928: 4-11).

waih, which is likely to be identical with Ibn Nûḥ's college, referred to by Ibn al-Hîtî by the corresponding Arabic term *dâr*[9]. Ibn Bakhtawaih is described as "the Babylonian" and "teacher of the diaspora" (*muʿal.lim al-jâliya*), which indicates that his career had begun in Iraq[10].

The *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ is not a systematically arranged description of the Hebrew language with the various aspects of grammar presented in separate chapters but rather a series of grammatical notes on the Bible, together with sporadic exegetical comments. Occasionally a general principle of grammar is discussed, but in most cases grammatical concepts are not explained and their sense must be inferred from the context in which they are used. The work covers the entire Bible, selecting words and phrases that are deemed to require elucidation and analysis. It consists of a series of entries headed by a phrase from a Biblical verse that constitutes the subject of the comment. The entries are arranged according to the order of verses in the Biblical text. By no means all verses, however, are commented upon. The work was clearly intended to be used as an aid to the reading of the Bible. It does not offer instruction on the rudiments of Hebrew grammar but rather concentrates on points that Ibn N'ú believed may be problematic for the reader or concerning which there was controversy. As is the case with many of the Karaite philological works, some of the extant manuscripts of the *Diqduq* contain an abridged version of the original text.

The main concern of the *Diqduq* is the analysis and explanation of word structure. On various occasions aspects of phonology and also the syntactic and rhetorical structure of a verse are taken into account, but this is generally done as a means of elucidating the form of a word. The pronunciation of the letters and vowels or syntactic structures are rarely, if ever, the primary focus of attention. There is no systematic treatment of syntax or rhetorical structures. The *Diqduq*, therefore, is not a comprehensive grammar of Hebrew, either in its arrangement or in its content. It concentrates on what are regarded as problematic grammatical issues. This is reflected in the title of the work *Nukat Diqduq*, which is found in one manuscript[11]. The Arabic term *nukat* can have the sense of "questions, difficult points" or "notes explaining difficulties"[12]. These problematic issues are generally referred to as *masâʾil* (singular *masʾala* "question") within the text of the *Diqduq*.

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[9] Cf. P. Kahle (1927-1930: 67) and J. Mann (1935: 31).

[10] Pinsker (1860: 62), Mann, (1935: 30). Note, however, that according to Ibn al-Hîtî, Ibn Nûh lived in Jerusalem for thirty years (Margoliouth, 1897: 433). The source published by Pinsker refers to a 'Book of Precepts' (*Sefer ha-Miṣwot*) of Yûsuf ibn Bakhtawaih. This, however, is thought by some to be a mistake of the author; cf. S. Poznanski (1896b: 215, n.4), Skoss (1928: introduction, 6-7).

[11] II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 1759, fol. 1ᵃ.

[12] Cf. Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes* II, 720.

In his analysis of word structure, Ibn Nûḥ attempted to find consistent rules governing the formation of words. The ultimate purpose of his grammatical activity, however, was not the analysis of the Hebrew language per se but rather the application of grammatical analysis in order to elucidate the precise meaning of the Biblical text. He adhered to the view that there was nothing random or inconsistent about the language of the Bible. Differences in forms must be explained by positing differences in the process of derivation. This concern with linguistic form arose from the conviction of Ibn Nûḥ that there was a direct link between form and meaning.

In the system of derivational morphology that is presented by Ibn Nûḥ, most inflected verbal forms are derived from an imperative base form. The imperative base is not an abstraction but is a real linguistic form. In some cases the imperative form that is posited as the base of an inflected verb does not actually occur in the language, e.g. *něton* for *natannu* (1 Chron. 29:14), *hǎlok*? for *tihǎlak* (Psa. 73:9) and *baqše* for *biqša* (Ecc. 7:28). According to a statement by Abû al-Faraj Hârûn, this practice of deriving verbal inflections from the imperative was also followed by the Kûfan school of Arabic grammar. The Kûfan school represented an early tradition of Arabic grammatical thought, which was current before the tenth century. This, therefore, may point to the early roots of the Karaite tradition [13].

Ibn Nûḥ also refers to abstract roots that underlie the linguistic forms. These consist of letters alone without vowels. It should be noted, however, that he considers the medial vowel letters *waw* or *yod* in forms such as *qum* and *śim* to be letters belonging to the abstract root. Final *he*, when acting as a vowel letter, is not, however, considered by Ibn Nûḥ to belong to the root.

On many occasions in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq*, a variety of different opinions are cited. The proponents of these are always left anonymous. The alternative opinions are introduced by formulas such as *yuqâl* 'it is said', *qâla baʿḍ al-ʾulamâ'* 'one scholar has said' and *qâla baʿḍ al-nâs* 'one person has said'. In some cases Ibn Nûḥ expresses his preference for one of these opinions by phrases such as *al-aqrab'an* … 'the most likely opinion is that …' Very frequently, however, he presents the divergent opinions without asserting any preference of his own. Even when he offers only one way of dealing with a particular grammatical issue, he often presents this as the opinion of another scholar, using one of the aforementioned formulas, rather than simply asserting it himself.

A problematic issue regarding the form of a word is referred to by the term *mas'ala*. This occurs when there is an apparent inconsistency with

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[13] See Khan (1997b: 318-325).

other related forms or with some general rule. These issues are usually not left open but rather a solution is offered. They were debated among the grammarians and Ibn Nûḥ frequently cites the opinions of others as to their solution.

The *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ is the earliest extant text that can be identified with certainty as a Karaite grammatical work. Ibn Nûḥ, however, was certainly not the earliest Karaite grammarian. Other Karaite scholars of his generation wrote grammatical works. Judah Hadassi, for instance, refers to a grammar book of Sahl ben Maṣliaḥ [14]. A number of grammatical concepts are found in the Bible commentaries of Yefet ben ʿEli. All of these scholars belonged to the generation of Ibn Nûḥ. As we have seen, Ibn Nûḥ himself refers to other anonymous scholars (*'ulamâ'*) of grammar. Some of these may have been his contemporaries, yet some are referred to as deceased [15]. Abû al-Faraj Hârûn attributes some grammatical concepts to the teachings of earlier Karaite grammarians in Iraq [16]. The traditions of this earlier Iraqi school described by Abû al-Faraj correspond closely to what we find in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq*. Ibn Nûḥ was an immigrant to Palestine from Iraq, where he was, it seems, a pupil of the Iraqi circle of Karaite grammarians.

According to a passage in one anonymous medieval Karaite source, the discipline of grammar began in Isfahân [17]. The Karaite al-Qirqisânî, writing in the first half of the tenth century, refers to Hebrew grammarians from Isfahân, Tustâr and Basra [18]. This indicates that already during the time of Saadya Gaon Karaite schools of grammar were well developed in Iran. The teachings of the early Karaite grammarians of Iran are also referred to in a anonymous Karaite grammatical text that was written in the eleventh century. These are referred to in the past tense, which implies that they were active at a period that predated that of the author [19].

Some fragments of Hebrew grammatical texts that are written in Judaeo-Persian have, indeed, been preserved in the Cairo Genizah. These

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[14] *Eskol ha-Kofer*, 167, letter *sin*, 173, letter *sade*.

[15] E.g. II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 4323, fol. 9a: *hâḏâ huwa maḏhab baʿḍ al-'ulamâ' raḥimahu allâh* 'This is the opinion of one of the sages, God have mercy upon him', where the blessing *raḥimahu allâh* suggests that the man in question is deceased.

[16] E.g. *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî*: *alladî ḏahaba ilâ ḏâlika … min al-diqdûqiyyîna qawm min al-ʿirâqiyyîna* 'those who have held this opinion from among the Hebrew grammarians are a group of the Iraqis' (MS II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 2437, fol. 37b:); *ḏâlika qad taqaḏâhu baʿḍ al-diqdûqiyyîna min mašâyikinâ al-'irâqiyyîna raḥimahum allâh* 'This has been done in depth by Hebrew grammarians among our Iraqi elders, may God have mercy upon them' (ibid., fol. 277b).

[17] Mann (1935: 104-105).

[18] *Kitâb al-'Anwâr wa-l-Marâqib*, L. Nemoy (ed.), vol. 1, chapter 17, 140.

[19] The text, which is referred to in a surviving colophon of the manuscript II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 2591 simply as *al-Mukhtaṣar*, mentions on a number of occasions the grammatical teachings of the *'ajam* (i.e. Persians). For further details on this text see below.

include fragments of a text that clearly belongs to the early Karaite tradition of grammar. This text is a grammatical commentary on the Bible that is very close, both in format and content, to the *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ. It is concerned with problematic issues in the text (*masâ'il*), as is the case with the *Diqduq*. Each section, indeed, opens with the rubric *masala* (i.e. *mas'ala*). These *masâ'il* correspond to a large extent with the ones that are addressed by Ibn Nûḥ in his *Diqduq*. The theory of grammar is virtually identical to that of the *Diqduq*. The derivative base of verbs is said to be imperative forms. It is likely to be a product of the early Iranian schools of Karaite grammar, which appear also to have been the ultimate source of the grammatical tradition that is reflected in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* [20].

The Hebrew term *diqduq* is found in sources predating the rise of Hebrew grammatical thought. In Rabbinic literature the verbal form *diqdeq* is used in the sense of attention to fine details of pronunciation, e.g. *qara' we-lo diqdeq be-otiyyotaw*? 'he read but did not pronounce its letters properly' [21] and also with the meaning of 'investigating thoroughly' the content of Scripture, e.g. *diqdaqnu be-kol toratkem* 'We have gone carefully through all your Torah' [22]. The verbal noun *diqduq* is often used in Rabbinic literature in the sense of 'the details that are revealed by careful investigation', e.g. *diqduqe ha-torah* 'minute details of biblical exposition' [23]. Among the texts relating to the activities of the Masoretes, the term is used in the title of the most famous collection of masoretic rules, the *diqduqe ha-ṭě'amim* compiled by Aharon ben Asher [24]. This refers to the subtle details of the use of accents in the Scripture. The author assumes that the general rules are known and focusses on the fine points and the exceptions to the general principles [25].

The title of Ibn Nûḥ's work, the *Diqduq* seems to have retained the sense of 'investigating the fine points of Scripture' and did not denote simply 'investigation of the language'. The discipline of *diqduq* as reflected in Ibn Nûḥ's work concentrated on selected details in the analysis of Scripture. It was concerned with the details that were judged to be problematic and in need of particular attention. Ibn Nûḥ assumed that the general rules of the language were already known to his audience.

In the early Karaite tradition, *diqduq* was a method of investigating the meaning of Scripture by the study of the subtle details of its language.

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[20] The text is published in Khan (2000b).

[21] Mishnah, Berakhot 2:3.

[22] Babylonian Talmud, Baba Qama 38a.

[23] Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 28a, Megillah 19a. Cf. Bacher (1899: 23-24).

[24] Aharon ben Asher was active in the first half of the tenth century, though the material that he assembled together in the *Diqduqe ha-Ṭě'amim* was mostly composed by earlier generations of Masoretes; see Baer and Strack (1879, xvi), Dotan (1967: 4).

[25] See Dotan (1967: 31).

From this usage the application of the term was eventually extended to refer specifically to the investigation of grammar. This no doubt came about when the study of Hebrew grammar had become established as an independent discipline.

The discipline of *diqduq* as exhibited by the work of Ibn Nûḥ was closely associated with the activity of the Masoretes, who applied themselves to the study of the details of the reading tradition and written transmission of the Biblical text. A central feature of Ibn Nûḥ's method of presentation is the explanation as to why a word has one particular form rather than another. This often involves comparing closely related forms that differ from the form that is under investigation only in small details. The issue that is addressed is why these fine distinctions in form exist. This may be compared to the practice of the Masoretes to collate words that were similar in form but differed only in details. This was a central feature of the masoretic method and lists recording these collations are found throughout the masoretic notes that were attached to Bible codices. The purpose of this was to draw attention to fine details of form to ensure that they were preserved in the transmission of Scripture. Collations of two closely related forms of word were also compiled in independent masoretic treatises, such as *Oklah we-Oklah* [26]. By the tenth century, the Masoretes also compiled treatises that formulated rules for the occurrence of some of these fine distinctions in form with regard to vowels and accents. The most famous work of this kind is the *Diqduqe ha-Ṭě'amim* 'The rules of the details of the accents', which was compiled in the first half of the tenth century by Aharon ben Asher [27].

The *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ may be described as a treatise whose main purpose was to formulate rules for the occurrence of distinctions in the form of words. The *Diqduq* contains some discussion of pronunciation and accents, but this is usually related to some issue regarding linguistic form. The *Diqduq* was intended, it seems, to complement such treatises as *Diqduqe ha-Ṭě'amim*, the exclusive concern of which was pronunciation and accents. It should be noted, however, that, in the discussion of the form of words, Ibn Nûḥ goes beyond what we would recognize as morphological analysis. On various occasions the explanation of the occurrence of a form requires a discussion of syntax, rhetorical structure and even the exegesis of the background of a verse.

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[26] The treatise *Oklah we-Oklah* is named after the first two words of the first list ('eating' [I Sam. 1:9] 'and eat' [Gen. 27:19]), which enumerates pairs of words, one occurring with the conjunctive *waw* and the other without it. For a general discussion of the background of the text see Yeivin (1980: 128-131). An edition of the text based on the best manuscripts has been made by Díaz Esteban (1975) and Ognibeni (1995).

[27] The definitive edition of this text is by A. Dotan (1967).

The grammatical activity denoted by the term *diqduq* in the early Karaite tradition, therefore, was closely associated with the work of the Masoretes. This is further shown by an early text published by Allony (1964) that contains a list of technical terms for the various aspects of Biblical study. These are described in the text as *diqduqe ha-miqra*, which has the sense of 'the fine points of Scripture established by detailed investigation'. The list includes masoretic, grammatical and hermeneutical terms. These correspond closely to the terminology and concepts of Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq*. The range of the topics of analysis denoted by the terms also parallels the scope of analysis that is found in the *Diqduq*, though, as we have remarked, the focus of the *Diqduq* is more on the grammatical and hermeneutical aspects than on the masoretic. It is more accurate to say that the masoretic works and Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* combined cover the range of topics contained in the list. The Masora and the grammatical work of Ibn Nûḥ complement each other to establish the *diqduqe ha-miqra*. This list was not intended primarily as a foundation for the study of grammar *per se*, but rather as a methodology for establishing the correct interpretation of Scripture.

Allony, in his edition of this text, claimed that it was of Karaite background. One should be cautious, however, of being too categorical on this issue. Certain details of its content suggest that it was composed in the early Islamic period. It would, therefore, come form a period when Karaism was in embryonic stages of development. The main evidence that Allony cites for its being a Karaite work is the reference in the text to the 'masters of Bible study' (*ba'ăle ha-miqra*). This term was used in some texts in the Middle Ages to designate Karaites [28]. It is found, however, already in Rabbinic literature in the sense of 'those who study only the Bible and not the Mishnah or Gemara' [29]. It should be noted, moreover, that in masoretic texts it is sometimes used as an epithet of the Masoretes, who were professionally occupied with the investigation of the Bible [30]. The contents of the list were incorporated by a number of later authors into their works. These included not only Karaites but also Rabbanites, such as Dunash ben Labrat [31].

The fact that some of the grammatical terms found in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* are Hebrew is significant for the dating of the origins of the Karaite grammatical tradition. The list of *diqduqe ha-miqra* is entirely in Hebrew. This is in conformity with the use of Hebrew in masoretic works before the tenth century. The Hebrew technical terms of Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* would be

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[28] It is used frequently in this way by the Karaites Salmon ben Yeruḥam and Judah Hadassi.

[29] Cf. Bacher (1899: 118).

[30] E.g. Baer and Strack (1879: XXXVIII).

[31] *Těšubot de Dunaš ben Labraṭ*, ed. A. Sáenz-Badillos, Granada, 1980, 15*.

vestiges from this early period. Some of this Hebrew terminology can, in fact, be traced to Rabbinic texts [32]. It is clear, however, that the Karaite grammatical tradition also took over elements from Arabic grammatical thought. The *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ contains some Arabic technical terms. Moreover, many of the Hebrew terms that are found in the list of *diqduqe ha-miqra* and also in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* appear to be calques of Arabic terminology. R. Talmon (1998) has shown that some of the Arabic terms that correspond to the Hebrew of the list *diqduqe ha-miqra* are found in the earliest layers of the tradition of Arabic grammar and Qur'ânic exegesis in the eighth and ninth centuries. This early tradition differed from the tradition based on the teachings of Sîbawayhi, which became the mainstream school in Arabic grammar after the ninth century. It is relevant to note that Arabic grammatical thought in its early stages was closely associated with Qur'ânic exegesis and only later became a distinct discipline [33]. This would parallel the association between grammar and exegesis reflected by the *diqduqe ha-miqra'* list and also the fact that the *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ has the structure of a Biblical commentary rather than a systematic description of grammar.

Some of the technical terms that appear in the list of *diqduqe ha-miqra* and in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* could be calques of terms from the Syriac or even the Hellenistic grammatical tradition. It should be noted, however, that one should not necessarily attempt to trace the background of certain terms and concepts to one particular tradition. It is more likely that many of the Hebrew terms have their origin in the early Islamic period (7th-8th centuries) when the Near East was a melting pot of ideas. It was at this period that Arabic grammatical thought developed by drawing elements from the Hellenistic and Syriac traditions. Some Hebrew terms may have been borrowed by the masoretic and Rabbinic traditions from the Syriac and Hellenistic schools even before the rise of Islam.

In the present state of research, therefore, it would appear that Hebrew grammatical thought began to develop at about the same period as vocalization systems were developed and that the early Karaite grammatical tradition was not isolated from mainstream Judaism. By the time of Ibn Nûḥ, at the end of the tenth century, after Saadya had published his works on grammar, the Karaite tradition appears to have become distinct from what was followed by the Rabbanites. Before the time of Saadya, however, there is no reason to believe that there were any significant differences between Karaites and Rabbanites in this field.

A few fragmentary texts are extant that are closely associated with Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* and belong to the early Karaite grammatical tradition. We have already mentioned a Judaeo-Persian grammatical commentary, which

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[32] See Bacher (1895a: 4, 1899: 99-100), Yeivin (1980: 116), Dotan (1990: 27-28).
[33] See Versteegh (1993).

parallels the *Diqduq* both in grammatical theory and in structure. In addition to this, two early Karaite grammatical texts have been preserved that are not in the form of Biblical commentaries but rather are systematic classifications of the morphological patterns of Biblical Hebrew verbs and nouns [34]. These classifications represent the core grammatical thought that developed within the early Karaite discipline of *diqduq*. Unlike the *diqduq* texts, such as those of Ibn Nûh and the anonymous Judaeo-Persian author, they are not concerned with the association between grammatical analysis and the exegesis of the meaning of the biblical text.

The text containing a classification of verbs is attributed to a certain Sa'îd. It is likely that this should be identified with the grammarian Sa'îd Sîrân, who is referred to in one source as a pupil of Abû Ya'qûb Yûsuf ibn Bakhtawaih [35]. As has been remarked above, Yûsuf ibn Bakhtawaih appears to have been an alternative name of Yûsuf ibn Nûh. The text exhibits many parallels with the grammatical work of Ibn Nûḥ, in its grammatical theory, terminology and argumentation. It consists of a series of chapters, each of which is devoted to verbs with imperative bases of one particular pattern. A full inventory is given of the verbs in each category, problematic issues are discussed and a complete paradigm of a representative verb is presented. In its overall structure, the treatise differs from Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq*, which, as we have seen, consists of grammatical notes on the Bible arranged in the order of the biblical verses. It, nevertheless, exhibits a similarity to the *Diqduq* in its method of discussing problematic issues. As is the case in the *Diqduq*, these discussions frequently offer a variety of different opinions concerning the derivation of a form. This applies especially where there is a problematic issue (*mas'ala*) concerning the derivation. The purpose of this method was to attempt to reach the truth by exploring many possible paths. The practice of presenting various views on an issue appears also to have had a pedagogical purpose. It encouraged enquiry and engagement rather than passive acceptance of authority. The main extant manuscript of this work contains a version of the text that has been elaborated by a second author, who refers to himself as *al-mufassir* 'the commentator'.

The second text is a treatise consisting of a series of chapters that classify the nouns in Biblical Hebrew according to their morphological pattern. Each chapter is devoted to nouns of one particular pattern. It includes an inventory of the nouns with this pattern, a discussion of various issues relating to the inflection of the nouns and a sample paradigm of a noun in all its inflections. This layout is similar to what is found in the treatise on verbs. It is indeed possible that the author of the two

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[34] These two texts, together with the Judaeo-Persian grammatical text, are published in Khan (2000b).

[35] Poznanski (1896a: 699), Steinschneider (1902: 89), Mann (1935: 30).

treatises was the same. The technical terminology in the two texts is very similar. One cannot even discount the possibility that the two treatises were originally one work. Some of the manuscripts of the treatise on nouns contain an elaborated form of the original with additions inserted by a second grammarian.

The grammatical works of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn and dependent treatises

Abû al-Faraj Hârûn ibn Faraj lived in Jerusalem in the first half of the 11th century. According to the chronicler Ibn al-Hîtî, he was attached to the Karaite college that had been established by Yûsuf ibn Nûḥ. After the death of Ibn Nûḥ, Abû al-Faraj took over the leadership of the college [36].

Abû al-Faraj Hârûn wrote several Arabic works on the Hebrew language. The largest of these is a comprehensive work on Hebrew morphology and syntax consisting of eight parts entitled *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil 'alâ al-Uṣûl wa-l-Fuṣûl fî al-Luġa al-'Ibrâniyya* ('The Comprehensive Book of General Principles and Particular Rules of the Hebrew Language'), which was completed in 1026 C.E. [37]. This consisted of eight parts, which may have originally been produced as separate books. He composed a shorter version of the work called *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî fî al-Luġa al-'Ibrâniyya* ('The Sufficient Book on the Hebrew Language').[38] The earliest known manuscript of this work has a colophon dated 1037 C.E.[39] *Al-Kitâb al-Kâfî* had a much wider circulation than *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil*, judging by the large number of extant manuscripts containing the work. We have a few fragments of two additional works that appear to be epitomes of *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî*. One of these is referred to by Abû al-Faraj simply as *al-Mukhtaṣar* ('The Short Version') and the other was entitled *Kitâb al-'Uqûd fî Taṣârîf al-Luġa al-'Ibrâniyya* ('Book of the Pearl-strings on the Grammatical Inflections of the Hebrew Language') [40]. In

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[36] Ibn al-Hîtî, ed. Margoliouth (1897: 433).

[37] For a summary of the contents of the *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* see Bacher (1895a: 232-256), who publishes a few short extracts. Recent studies of aspects of grammar in *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* have been published by Maman (1996a and 1996b) and Basal (1998, 1999).

[38] See Skoss (1928, introduction 11-27), Gil (1983, vol. I, section 938, and the references cited there). Extracts from *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî* have been published by S. Poznanski (1896b), M. N. Zislin (1962, 1965), Allony (1983) and D. Becker (1991). A full edition and English translation of *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî* is currently being prepared by G. Khan, M. A. Gallego and J. Olszowy-Schlanger.

[39] II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 4601, fol. 107a. A note in the margin of fol. 110a indicates that the manuscript was the property of the author's two sons, Faraj and Yehudah.

[40] Fragments of *Kitâb al-'Uqûd* were published by H. Hirschfeld (1922-23: 1-7). N. Basal (1997) has published some leaves that he identifies as coming from *al-Mukhtaṣar* of Abû al-Faraj.

the introduction to *Kitâb al-'Uqûd* it is stated that this work is more concise than *al-Mukhtasar*[41].

A further work of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn, which has survived in various manuscript fragments, is an introductory treatise on grammar entitled *Kitâb al-Madkhal ilâ 'Ilm al-Diqduq fî Ṭuruq al-Luġa al-'Ibrâniyya* ('Book of Introduction into the Discipline of Careful Investigation of the Ways of the Hebrew Language'). According to the preface of this text, Abû al-Faraj wrote it after his completion of *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* and *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî*. The work includes a discussion of the terminology that was used by the earlier Karaite grammarians. These include many of the Hebrew terms that are found in the *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûh and related early texts but not used by Abû al-Faraj himself in in his own grammatical works[42].

Also extant are manuscripts of a grammatical commentary on the Bible that is attributed in the colophons to Abû al-Faraj. This includes an Arabic translation of the Biblical verses[43].

Most of the grammatical works of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn are systematically arranged studies of the Hebrew language as an independent discipline. He, indeed, sometimes goes beyond a description of specifically Hebrew grammar and discusses general principles of language. In some sections of his works he addresses philosophical issues such as the origin of language and its nature[44]. The perspective of these works, therefore, differs from that of Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq*, the primary purpose of which was the investigation of Scripture by grammatical analysis rather than the study of the language per se. His comprehensive approach to grammar contrasts with Ibn Nûh's practice of concentrating on the problematic issues (*masâ'il, nukat*). Another divergence from the approach of Ibn Nûḥ is the categorical approach of Abû al-Faraj. He rarely presents alternative opinions.

Abû al-Faraj refers to the grammarians of earlier generations such as Ibn Nûḥ as *al-diqdûqiyyûna*. He did not use the term *diqdûqiyyûna* to designate all people engaged in the study of grammar. He makes an explicit terminological distinction between the Arabic grammarians (*al-nuḥâ*)

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[41] *qad kuntu ikhtaṣartu al-Kâfî fî al-Luġa … wa-sa'ala sâ'il an akhtaṣar mukhtaṣar âkhar awjaz min al-mukhtaṣar al-maḏkûr* 'I summarized the book *al-Kâfî fî al-Luja* … and somebody asked me to make another short version that is more concise than the aforementioned short version' (Hirschfeld 1922-23: 5).

[42] A large section of this work has been preserved in II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 4601, fol. 110a ff.

[43] A fragment of this was published by Poznanski (1908: 55-67); cf. also British Library Or. 2499 fols. 1-21 (Margoliouth, 1899 no. 276). An edition of this text is being prepared by J. Olszowy-Schlanger.

[44] For the views of the medieval Karaites on the origin and nature of language see Olszowy-Schlanger (1997) and (1998: 87-97).

and the early Karaite Hebrew grammarians (*al-diqdûqiyyûna*) [45]. Moreover, the way he uses the term *diqdûqiyyûna* in his writings implies that they were a set of scholars distinct from himself and that he did not regard himself as one of their number. He attributes some opinions to the earlier Karaite grammarians, for instance, by phrases such as the statement of the *diqdûqiyyûna* that ….'without qualifying the term *diqdûqiyyûna* by adjectives such as 'other' or 'earlier' [46]. The implication of this is that Abû al-Faraj regarded himself as in some way independent of these earlier grammarians. He considered, it seems, that the nature of his grammatical investigation was different.

One way in which this differed was that the primary purpose of Abû al-Faraj was the systematic investigation of the language, whereas the main objective of some of the earlier Karaite grammarians, such as Ibn Nûḥ, was the elucidation of the problematic grammatical details of Scripture. Attempts were made already by certain circles of Karaite grammarians before the time of Abû al-Faraj to systematize grammatical knowledge. This consisted mainly in the classification of verbs and nouns according to their patterns and inflections. These treatises, however, lacked the scope of the grammatical works of Abû al-Faraj. A number of elements from the earlier Karaite grammatical tradition were incorporated into the works of Abû al-Faraj. He diverges from the approach of his Karaite predecessors, however, in many aspects. He follows closely the approach to grammar that had been adopted by most Arabic grammarians of his time. This was the approach of the so-called Basran school of Arabic grammarians, which had become the mainstream tradition by the 10th century. The dependence of Abû al-Faraj on the Basran tradition is seen in the scope of his works, in his grammatical theory and in his Arabic technical terminology. Much of the terminology of the earlier Karaite tradition, by contrast, was Hebrew. One example of this relating to grammatical theory is his claim that the derivational base of verbs is the infinitive rather than the imperative form. As we have seen, the derivation of verbs from the imperative was a central feature of the earlier Karaite grammatical theory.

A number of other medieval Karaite grammatical works are extant that are largely dependent on the writings of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn and were written in the eleventh century. One such work is the grammatical treatise written in Hebrew known as *Me'or 'Ayin* that has been published by M.N. Zislin (Moscow, 1990) on the basis of a single surviving manuscript [47].

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[45] This is seen, for example, in the passage from *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî* that is published in G. Khan (1997b: 318).

[46] E.g. *al-kalâm fîmâ yaḏkuruhu al-diqdûqiyyûna fî al-awâmir* 'Discussion of the statement of the *diqduq* scholars concerning imperatives' (*al-Kitâb al-Kâfî*, in Khan 1997b: 318).

[47] II Firk. Evr. IIA 1321. An important contribution to the assessment of this text is made by A. Maman (1994) in his review of the edition of Zislin.

The text was written by an anonymous author in Byzantium some time during the second half of the eleventh century. According to the colophon, the manuscript was written in 1208 in the town of Gagra, which is situated on the eastern shore of the Black Sea (now in Georgia). The work is largely derivative from the works of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn, especially, it seems, *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî*. Some elements, however, are drawn directly from the early Karaite grammatical tradition.

One of the immediate sources of *Me'or 'Ayin* appears to be an anonymous Arabic grammatical work that is extant in a number of manuscripts [48]. This text is referred to in the colophon simply as *al-Mukhtaṣar* ('The Digest'). It is largely devoted to verbal inflections, but also contains chapters on other grammatical topics. The author was an anonymous scholar who mentions Abû al-Faraj Hârûn as his contemporary and so the work should be distinguished from the short version of *al-Kitâb al-Kâfî* referred to in one source as *al-Mukhtaṣar* that was written by Abû al-Faraj Hârûn himself. It is clear that the work is dependent on Abû al-Faraj to a large extent, though the author had access also to earlier Karaite sources.

As far as we can establish in our present state of knowledge, the Karaite grammatical tradition, which had exhibited such creativity in the tenth and eleventh centuries, became virtually defunct in the twelfth century. Manuscripts of the medieval works, especially those of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn, continued to be copied in later centuries. It appears, however, that little original contribution to Hebrew grammatical thought was made by Karaites in the later Middle Ages. The Karaite Judah Hadassi, for example, who was active in Byzantium in the twelfth century, presents a section on Hebrew grammar in his *Eskol ha-Kofer* that is dependent on the system of the Spanish grammarians Ḥayyûj and Ibn Janâḥ [49]. Abû al-Faraj Ḥârûn mentions Hayyûj in some of his works, but did not adopt his theory of root structure. Although manuscripts of the medieval Karaite grammarians continued to be copied in the East, only limited knowledge of their works was transmitted to the West. This applied especially to the works of the early Karaite grammatical tradition. Some of the medieval Hebrew grammarians of Spain were aware of *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* by Abû al-Faraj Hârûn, but this work did not make any clearly recognizable impression on the Western tradition of Hebrew grammar, which has predominated down to the present.

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[48] The text, which was first discovered by M. Zislin (cf. Zislin 1990: 17) is preserved in the manuscript II Firk. Evr. Arab. I 2591. A number of fragments of the work can be found in the Cairo Genizah.

[49] See A. Maman (1996: 95-96).

LEXICOGRAPHY

Closely related to the work of the grammarians was lexicography. The Karaites made an important contribution also to this discipline in the Middle Ages. The most important Karaite lexicographical work that is known is the monumental dictionary of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic known as *Kitâb Jâmi' al-Alfâẓ* 'The Book of the Collection of Words' by Abû Sulaymân Dâ'ûd ibn Ibrâhîm al-Fâsî[50]. Judging by his *nisba*, al-Fâsî was a native of Fez in North Africa, but it is clear that he was well established as a resident of Palestine when he wrote his dictionary. He was active in the second half of the tenth century and so was roughly contemporary with Ibn Nûḥ. His work enjoyed considerable popularity in the Middle Ages. This is shown by the fact that several abridgements were made of his work. On the basis of the surviving manuscripts, Skoss believes that *Kitâb Jâmi' al-Alfâz* was written by al-Fâsî in two versions, one longer than the other. The text that is presented in his edition is the shorter version. The work was later abridged by Levi ben Yefet, the son of the exegete Yefet ben 'Eli. This abridgement was in turn epitomized by 'Alî ibn Sulaymân in the second half of the eleventh century. Another, roughly contemporary but apparently independent, epitome of Levi ben Yefet's abridgement was made by a Rabbanite known as 'Alî ibn Israel[51]. There is, indeed, evidence that al-Fâsî's dictionary, or one of its abridgements, was used by Rabbanites in the eleventh century before Ibn Janâh's dictionary *Kitâb al-Uṣûl* became widely available[52]. Knowledge of *Kitâb Jâmi' al-Alfâẓ* seems, however, to have been lost in the later Middle Ages among both Karaites and Rabbanites.

Al-Fâsî was probably not the only Karaite lexicographer of his day. Abû al-Faraj Hârûn in *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* mentions the dictionary of al-Fâsî and refers to the existence also of another dictionary, which was written by one of Abû al-Faraj's predecessors, presumably Karaite[53]. Al-Fâsî states[54] that in his system of arrangement he followed the example of earlier lexicographers. The structure of *Kitâb Jâmi' al-Alfâz* differs from Saadya's *Egron*, so the reference must be to other works, possibly Judah ibn Qurays's dictionary, no longer extant, mentioned in his *Risâlah* to the Jews of Fez, and other unknown works. Indeed al-Fâsî's frequent practice of comparing

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[50] The text was published in an exemplary edition by Skoss (1936-45). Studies of various aspects of the texts include those by Maman (1986, 1992) and Polliack (1997: 58-64).

[51] Skoss (1936: XCIV-CXX). For a description of the abridgement of 'Alî ibn Sulaymân see Pinsker (1860: 175ff.). An extract of the latter text was published also by Neubauer (1875: 773ff.).

[52] Skoss (1936: XXXVII, n. 33).

[53] Cf. (Bacher 1895a: 252).

[54] Ed. Skoss, (1936:1).

Hebrew with Arabic and Aramaic are reminiscent of the methodology of Judah ibn Qurays (first half of tenth century). Some of al-Fâsî's definitions of words can be traced to earlier Karaite and Rabbanite exegesis [55].

Kitâb Jâmi' al-Alfaẓ is arranged alphabetically with a separate chapter devoted to each letter. Within each chapter words are arranged in subsections according to the first two root letters. Al-Fâsî employs various means of indentifying and interpreting Hebrew and Aramaic roots. As has been remarked already, he frequently compares Hebrew words with Aramaic and Arabic. He often states that a word should be understood *'alâ masmû'ihi*, i.e. according to the similar sounding Arabic word. An interesting aspect of his methodology is his tendency to translate Hebrew words with Arabic cognates, even where the Arabic cognates are rare or indeed even artificial words [56]. Another feature of his work is the association of roots by means the permutation and metathesis of letters, a practice that is found in Rabbanite lexicographical works such as *al-Kit'âb al-Hâwî* of Ḥay Gaon, who was a contemporary of al-Fâsî, and also the works of the Arabic lexicographers [57].

Kitâb Jâmi' al-Alfaẓ reflects many of the grammatical concepts that were current among the Karaites at that period. Many of these concepts as well as the grammatical terminology are similar to those of Ibn Nuḥ. The imperative is considered to be the morphological base of verbs. There are, however, some differences. Al-Fâsî's uses the concept of the 'stable letter' root, according to which only those letters of a word that occur in all its inflections are included in the root. There is no clear parallel to this in the *Diqduq* of Ibn Nûḥ. Some of the terminology that is not found in Ibn Nûḥ's *Diqduq* occurs in other early Karaite grammatical texts. Al-Fâsî's division of the alphabet into eleven servile and eleven non-servile letters no doubt derived from Saadya's grammatical writings. Some of the later abridgements reflect the adoption of different grammatical concepts. 'Alî ibn Sulaymân cites Ḥayyûj by name and is acquainted with his triliteral theory of roots.

Another important Karaite contribution to lexicography is the seventh part of *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* of Abû al-Faraj Hârûn. This consists of definitions of words in the Bible [58]. The roots are arranged according to an anagrammatical principle. Within a section that is headed by a series of radicals are placed all words that contain these radicals in any order. In the section bearing the rubric *sl'*, for example, are included the roots *sl'*,

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[55] The background of some of al-Fâsî's definitions has been examined by Maman (1986: 153-71).

[56] For this tendency see Maman (1992).

[57] For al-Fâsî's treatment of permutation of letters see Skoss (1932-33).

[58] For a discussion of the contents of this section see Bacher (1895a: 247-248). Extracts have been published by Poznanski (1896b: 26-36).

'ls and *'sl*. As far as can be seen by the available sources, this lexicographical chapter did not include all Biblical Hebrew roots, but only those with three strong radicals. As we have remarked above, Abû al-Faraj in most cases did not consider weak letters to be radicals and so words with weak letters are not included.

BIBLICAL READING

In a survey of the contributions of the medieval Karaites to the study of the Hebrew language we should include their efforts to preserve and describe the reading of the Bible. Our knowledge of the Tiberian reading tradition is largely based on Karaite texts. The Tiberian reading tradition was regarded in the Middle Ages as the most prestigious and authoritative tradition. It is the pronunciation of the Bible that the Tiberian Masoretes represented by the Tiberian system of vocalization signs. Jewish scholars in many communities strove to use this reading tradition. The majority of people in the medieval Jewish communites, however, pronounced the Bible with a different tradition. With the passage of time, however, the knowledge of the Tiberian reading was lost, although the Tiberian vocalization signs became standard in Hebrew Bible codices. The result was that Bible manuscripts were written with Tiberian vocalization signs but read with a pronunciation that did not correspond to the one that the signs were originally designed to represent.

It is only recently that the original Tiberian reading tradition has been reconstructed, and, as remarked above, this is due to a large degree to Karaite texts that have come down to us from the Middle Ages.

The Masoretes themselves appear not to have belonged to the Karaite movement. As we have seen, however, there was a close association between the early Karaite tradition of grammar and the Masoretic tradition. The Karaite communities in the East during the Middle Ages, moreover, took it upon themselves to preserve many of the oldest and most important Tiberian masoretic manuscripts. We see this from the colophons of the surviving Tiberian Bible manuscripts, which frequently indicate that they had been dedicated to a Karaite community[59].

Towards the end of the period when the Masoretes were active, a number of treatises were compiled that were concerned with various aspects of the pronunciation and cantillation of the Bible. One of the most important of these treatises was one know as *Hidâyat al-Qâri'* ('Guide for the Reader'), which was written in Arabic by the Karaite grammarian Abû al-Faraj Hârûn[60]. It was intended by Abû al-Faraj to complement his

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[59] For details see Khan (1992a:158n.).
[60] For a detailed study of this text see Eldar (1994).

work on grammar, *al-Kitâb al-Muštamil* and its shorter versions, which contained little description of the pronunciation the language.

This work presents a description of the pronunciation of the consonants and vowels and the rules of the cantillation signs according to the Tiberian tradition. Abû al-Faraj clearly had a first-hand knowledge of the Tiberian pronunciation tradition, which was still being transmitted orally in Palestine in his day (the first half of the eleventh century). The contemporary grammarians of Spain did not have this direct access to the genuine Tiberian pronunciation tradition, nor did any of the later grammarians in the Western tradition. It is for this reason that modern textbooks of Biblical Hebrew still present us with a pronunciation that does not correspond to the original Tiberian one.

The *Hidâyat al-Qâri'* therefore, is an important source for our reconstruction of Tiberian pronunciation. Abû al-Faraj produced the work in a longer and a shorter version. The shorter version had a much wider distribution than the longer one judging by the number of manuscripts that are extant [61]. The work found its way to Jewish communities far beyond Palestine. Adaptations of the original longer version were made in Yemen, apparently in the thirteenth century, one in Hebrew and the other in Arabic [62]. Two Hebrew translations of the shorter version were made in Central Europe in the Middle Ages. One of these was made in Mainz, Germany, and was entitled *Sefer Horayat Ha-Qore'* ('The Book of Instruction for the Reader'). The other exists in various manuscripts of Italian provenance, which present it either with the title *Token 'Ezra* or *Sefer Ṭa'ăme Ha-Miqra* ('The Book of Biblical Accents'). In the manuscript in which it is entitled *Sefer Ṭa'ăme Ha-Miqra* the work is erroneously attributed to Judah ibn Bal'am. Parts of the shorter version of *Hidâyat al-Qâri'* were paraphrased in Hebrew by the Byzantine Karaite Joseph ha-Qustandini in his eclectic work *'Adat děborim* ('Swarm of Bees'), which was composed some time in the eleventh century [63].

Another important source for the reconstruction of the Tiberian reading tradition is a corpus of medieval Karaite manuscripts containing the text of the Hebrew Bible transcribed into Arabic letters. These were used by Karaites concomitantly with traditional Bible texts written in Hebrew script.

It should be noted that in the Middle Ages the Karaites of the Arabic speaking world wrote Arabic either in Hebrew or in Arabic script. Manuscript copies were often made of the text of a Karaite Arabic in both

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[61] Extracts from the longer version are published in Eldar (1981, 1994). Most of the text of the shorter version that is known to be extant is published in Eldar (1987).

[62] The Arabic version was published by Neubauer (1891) and the Hebrew version by Derenbourg (1871).

[63] For further details of these translations and adaptations see Eldar (1994: 15-19).

scripts, according to the preference of the person commissioning the copies. Interesting light has been shed on this by a letter preserved in the Genizah that was sent by an amanuensis of the Karaite scholar Yĕšu'ah ben Yĕhudah to a Karaite dignitary in Egypt who had commissioned Yĕšu'ah to produce a Bible commentary. The purpose of the letter is to ask whether the one commissioning the text wishes the author to write it in Hebrew script or Arabic script [64].

The transcriptions of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic script are in some cases written as separate manuscripts. In many cases, however, they are accompanied in the manuscripts by an Arabic translation and a commentary. In manuscripts of Karaite Arabic texts written in Arabic script, moreover, Hebrew words and citations are frequently transcribed. Arabic transcriptions were made also of citations from Rabbinic literature. It was not the custom, however, to write Hebrew texts composed by medieval authors in Arabic script. The practice seems to have been restricted to texts with an oral tradition [65].

The manuscripts of the extant Bible transcriptions contain colophons with dates ranging from the 11th to 15th centuries C.E. The transcription represents the reading tradition of the Bible rather than the tradition of the consonantal text. The manuscripts exhibit a variety of different types of Arabic orthography. In the vast majority of cases, full use is made of Arabic *matres lectionis* to represent long vowels. For this reason the texts are important sources for the reconstruction of the medieval reading traditions, since most of the medieval Hebrew vocalization systems do not systematically mark distinctions in vowel length. Most manuscripts represent the Tiberian reading tradition, though sometimes there are slight deviations from this. The Hebrew vocalization and accent signs are also marked in many of the manuscripts [66].

The motivation for the Karaites to write Hebrew in Arabic script is still not completely clear. It appears that the transcriptions were largely used for private study. The model masoretic Bible manuscripts that were deposited in synagogues were always written in Hebrew script [67].

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[64] The letter was published by Khan (1993b). For the question of the script used in Karaite Arabic manuscripts see also Blau (1999: 35ff. and the addenda; 1976).

[65] Most of the transcriptions that are known to be extant are preserved in the Firkovitch collections in St. Petersburg, in the British Library and Cairo Genizah. A preliminary study of the manuscripts of the British Library was made already by Hoerning (1889). For more recent studies see Khan (1989a, 1989b, 1992b, 1993a, 1994, 1997a). For the Genizah material see Khan (1990a). The manuscripts from the Firkovitch collections have been studied by Harviainen (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995, 1996b).

[66] Linguistic studies of the Tiberian reading tradition on the basis of the transcriptions include Khan (1987, 1989a, 1991b, 1992b, 1994, 1996a, 1997c).

[67] For the motivation for the transcriptions see Ben-Shammai (1982), Khan (1990b, 1991a, 1992a, where the previous literature on the topic is discussed), Blau (1999: 245-247) and Tirosh-Becker (1999: 36-47).

The transcriptions of citations from Rabbinic literature cast new light on the transmission of Rabbinic Hebrew in the Middle Ages. In many cases these citations are some of the earliest attestations of a text. They often reflect hitherto unknown traditions of the phonology and morphology of Rabbinic Hebrew. This applies also to some of the Rabbinic citations in Karaite manuscripts that are written in Hebrew script[68].

Many of the extant texts in the fields surveyed above have still not been published or studied, but it is already clear in the present state of research that the medieval Karaites made major contributions to the study of the Hebrew language. They also preserved for posterity many Hebrew language traditions that may otherwise have been lost.

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