

ABSTRACT

SA'ADIA GAON'S INTERPRETATION OF THE THIRTEEN HERMENEUTICAL  
PRINCIPLES ACCORDING TO THE ARABIC SOURCE:  
COMMENTARY, TENDENCIES, AND UNKNOWN SOURCES

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Sa'adia Gaon (d. 942 AD) wrote a commentary on the thirteen hermeneutical principles attributed to R. Yishmael at the beginning of the *Sifra*. His commentary contains some unknown *Midrashic* material and presents original interpretive approaches along with hints of polemical activity. The original Judaeo-Arabic text of this commentary was, until recently, unknown, and all scholarly work on it was based on a medieval Hebrew translation preserved in a single manuscript. The Hebrew translation raised several unanswered questions. The commentary does not appear in any of the lists found in the Cairo Geniza of Saadia's works, not even in the list prepared by his two sons. The time and place of the translator are unclear. Above all, in the absence of the original Judaeo-Arabic text, there was no way to evaluate the faithfulness of the translation.

This article deals with these issues and presents the Arabic original, which survived almost entirely, along with a new Hebrew translation. We find that the previous translation is part translation, part reworking of the text – a standard practice in translations from that period. This reworking omitted close to half of the original material. The article answers the open question of the time and place of the translation, identifies the source of the *Midrashic* material, and presents parallel passages from other works by Sa'adia to demonstrate his originality. Finally, for the first time, the article raises the possibility that another ancient commentary was available to Saadia.