Written Witnesses Employed for the Present Edition

1 Primary Witnesses to Saadia’s Commentary on Esther (Kitāb al-īnās)

The surviving witnesses to Kitāb al-īnās are all incomplete, ranging from a tiny fragment, less than 3.5 cm in diameter (frag. 12ג), to a loose collection of 38 relatively small folios (MS י). Instances of explicit attribution are therefore almost entirely lacking among the witnesses—the two exceptions being MS ח, which uniquely preserves the beginning of Saadia’s introduction and opening title of the work, and MS 4א (a condensed reworking of Kitāb al-īnās), in which the comment on 1:1 is prefaced by a reference to “Our master Saadia Gaon” (אבותון פועדו נאמן [...] ). The identification of each separately-catalogued witness is based, accordingly, on its meeting one or more of the following criteria:

i. The witness contains an Arabic translation of the book of Esther corresponding to that of Saadia (per the edition of Qafīḥ, Scrolls), notwithstanding minor variants. Coordinate with this criterion is the consistent organization of the translation and commentary by pericope (rather than by verse), a method of organization otherwise attested among known (Judaeo-)Arabic exegetes—at least with respect to Esther—only by the Karaite Yefet ben ‘Eli (fl. late-10th cent.).

ii. The commentator in the witness cites or alludes to his translation of another portion of Scripture corresponding to the translation of Saadia.

iii. The commentator in the witness refers to an explanation presented by him elsewhere which is found, among the known Judaeo-Arabic exegetes, only in the works of Saadia.

iv. The witness contains commentary corresponding to previously identified portions of Saadia’s commentary on the book of Esther.

v. The witness belongs to the same MS containing a previously identified portion of Saadia’s commentary on the book of Esther.

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1 On Yefet and his commentary see the following note. Salmon ben Yeruḥam—the only other Judaeo-Arabic exegete of whom we are aware to adopt this alternating format for a commentary on Esther—typically alternates his translation and commentary by verse (albeit occasionally grouping two or three verses together).
vi. In addition to one of the previous criteria, the commentary in the witness contains a view attributed to Saadia by a later exegete.

Consistent with these criteria, a total of 63 separately-catalogued items, representing 23 distinct MSS, have been identified as primary witnesses to the text of Kitāb al-īnās. By way of comparison to other Judaeo-Arabic commentaries on Esther—and as one measure of the relative popularity of Saadia’s work—10 distinct MSS have been identified for the commentary of Yefet ben ‘Eli2 (ostensibly the Karaite exegete par excellence), four for that of Yefet’s older coreligionist Salmon ben Yeruḥam3 (fl. mid-10th cent.), two each for those of the Karaites Yūsuf b. Nūḥ4 (fl. late-10th–early-11th cent.) and Judah Meʾir Tawrizi5 (fl. first half of the 17th cent.), and one each for the Rabbanite commentaries of Judah ibn Balʿam6 (fl. second half of the 11th cent.) and Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi7

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2 For an edition and translation of this work see Wechsler, Yefet. For recent biographical data on Yefet see ibid., 3–11; idem, “Japheth”; and Zawonowska, Abraham Narratives, 9–12. Our reference in “Guidelines,” 204, to 11 distinct MSS of Yefet’s commentary was made in error, since it is clear that MS B (BL Or. 2520, fol. 174–175) is part of the same original codex as MS R2 (MS NLR Evr.-Arab. I 3963)—the place of the former being between fols. 11–12 of the latter.

3 An edition and translation of this commentary is in preparation by the present writer and under contract to appear in Brill’s Karaite Texts and Studies (ÉJM 47). For a detailed inventory of these MSS (which are enumerated in the bibliography, s.v. Salmon, Esther) see Wechsler, Yefet, 126–127. In addition to these MSS, a single leaf from Salmon’s introduction through most of his comment on 1:1 was published with Hebrew translation by Ratzaby (“Fragments,” 205–206, 213–214 [เกษตร]) under the title “A fragment from an anonymous commentary on Esther,” though without the MS classmark or any other identifying data. To date, after having examined practically all known and catalogued Judaeo-Arabic manuscript remains of Esther exegesis, we have still been unable to locate this fragment. An apparent reworking (précis?) of Salmon’s commentary, moreover, is extant in MS NLR Evr.-Arab. I 4021 (one leaf; see Wechsler, Strangers, 347 [§ 2.2.6]). For recent biographical data on Salmon see Robinson, Asceticism, 18–19; and Wechsler, “Salmon.”

4 For an edition and translation see Khan, Dīqdūq, 484–493. For recent biographical data see ibid., 5–7; idem, “Ibn Nūḥ.”

5 This commentary is currently still in manuscript (for details see Wechsler, Strangers, 346), though substantial excerpts are cited in the present work, in our notes to the English translation (see below, Index 4, sub nomine). For biographical data see Wechsler, Yefet, 128–129.

6 The one surviving folio of this work was edited by Wechsler, “Fragments: Text,” 39*. For a recent biography see Martínez Delgado, “Ibn Balaam.”

7 For an edition and translation see Wechsler, Strangers. For recent biographical data see ibid., 3–15; idem, “Tanḥum”; Shy, Murshid, 8–9; and Tal, “Methods,” 2–5.