In late eleventh to early twelfth century Constantinople, Tobias ben Moses—the famous Karaite master translator of Judaeo-Arabic literature into Hebrew—furnishes an interesting observation as to the different approaches of translators and their translation techniques. It is situated in a discussion on the meaning of the Hebrew word ḥelev ‘fat’ in his Oṣar Nehmad on the book of Leviticus, in which Tobias elaborates different possibilities of translating it into Judaeo-Arabic. Throughout his discussion he carefully distinguishes two contrary translational strategies in his terminology: for the first he exclusively uses the Hebrew verb patar (comp. Arab. fassara), by means of which he commonly refers to Saʿadia’s Tafsīr. The Tafsīr is known as a non-literal translation that principally reflects the halakic interpretations and the exegetical understanding of its author. It is juxtaposed to a different translation type, designated by the Hebrew verb tirgem (comp. Arab. tarjama) and characterised by an ad litteram approach. Distinctive of this second type is that the Hebrew source text is usually translated word-by-word or even morpheme-by-morpheme, comparable to a translational mirror of all linguistic elements in the Hebrew source.

It is reasonable to assume that the typology inherently followed by Tobias ben Moses has its root in an essential dichotomy exhibited in early Judaeo-Arabic translations. As he observed, the various traditions oscillated between the basic question, whether to capture the precise linguistic form (Arab. lafẓ) literally or the understood meaning (Arab. maʿnā). In discussing their emergence, literary context, and interrelatedness, I will present a tentative typology of early Judaeo-Arabic Pentateuch translations from the ninth to eleventh centuries. The typology of the two different, even diametrically opposed, translation strategies in those translations is strikingly similar to Tobias ben Moses’ observation. I will demonstrate that the first approach (Hebr. tirgem,
Arab. *tarjama*) may be identified in early non-sa‘adianic traditions. Their literary genesis appears to relate to older oral traditions that served the need of instructing the biblical text to the public in Judaeo-Arabic in an educational framework, a function that had previously been fulfilled by the Aramaic targumim. In contrast, the translation type referred to by the Hebrew verb *patar* (Arab. *fassara*) may be found in Sa‘adia’s *Tafsīr*, but not only. It primarily strives to convey a non-imitative translation, i.e. the intended meaning of the source text in the target language, rather than its linguistic form in all details. The translation may be prompted by the larger context of a textual unit, interpretative and stylistic considerations, at the expense of formal equivalence. Exactly between these two conflicting priorities whether to capture form or meaning, early Judaeo-Arabic Pentateuch translations emerged and assumed their distinct shapes.

**Background**

Medieval Judaeo-Arabic translations of the Pentateuch are amply represented in the various collections of fragments preserved in the Cairo Geniza.³ Samples belonging to the early and classical period are attested alongside those of later periods, undoubtedly bestowing upon the collections the distinction of being one of our main sources for the study of Judaeo-Arabic versions. The texts preserved stem from a variety of provenances, geographical but also communal (Rabbanite and Karaite). In addition to these, also Samaritan and Christian traditions are attested, yet in a comparably lesser number.⁴ Their appearance is directly contingent upon the arabicisation of the Near-East during the seventh

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³ In the light of the ongoing cataloguing, a precise percentage is a matter of mere conjecture. However, the proportion of Judaeo-Arabic Bible translations has been estimated ca. twenty percent of the literary corpus in the CUL T-S Arabic Series, see Baker and Polliack (2001: xiii). That number may well be representative of all the material in Judaeo-Arabic. A preliminary survey of Judaeo-Arabic translation traditions is found in Polliack (1999), (1998), and (1997).

⁴ CUL – T-S Ar. 1a.136 (Genesis 4:4–15), for example, contains the version of the Samaritan scholar Abū Sa‘īd, active in thirteenth-century Egypt. He did not translate anew the Samaritan Pentateuch into Arabic, but rather aimed at a revision of the earlier version identified in a group of bilingual or trilingual manuscripts in Samaritan letters, and introduced various scholia to his text. For details, cf. Shehadeh (1989a: 481–516), (1989b). In addition, Oxford – Bodleian Library Heb. d. 64.84 exhibits a Samaritan commentary on Exodus with interspersed translation units. For the Christian-Arabic translations fragments, see Vollandt (forthcoming).