

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

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# Table of Contents

## VOLUME ONE

Introduction .....	vii
List of Contributors .....	ix
Transcription Tables .....	xiii
Articles A-F .....	I

## VOLUME TWO

Transcription Tables .....	vii
Articles G-O .....	I

## VOLUME THREE

Transcription Tables .....	vii
Articles P-Z .....	I

## VOLUME FOUR

Transcription Tables .....	vii
Index .....	I

נְבִיזִים [mis-sabib le-ḥalab hal-laban mistobebim šib'a zebubim nibzim] for normative *mi-saviv le-ḥalav ha-lavan mistovevim šiv'a zuvvim nivvim* 'around the white milk are circling seven loathsome flies' (Bar-Adon 1975:87). Hints of Galilean Dialect pronunciation can still be heard in the speech of elderly people, especially in their use of hyper-corrected forms, e.g., דּוּקָא [dabka] 'precisely; for spite' (rather than *davqa*), where the standard *v* sound of ו (waw) has been replaced by *b*, or מְדַבֵּר [medaver] 'speaking' (rather than *medaber*), where the original *b* sound of ב (bet) has been replaced by *v*.

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## Gaonic Correspondence

The *ge'onim* throughout much of their history were remote from the majority of the Jewish population over whom they wielded spiritual and moral leadership, and they were thus accustomed to communicating through letters. While much of their earlier correspondence has come down to us in the form of collections of gaonic responsa, a form of communication characterized by its legalistic character and technical language, thanks to the discovery of the Cairo Genizah, we possess hundreds of other letters, written by the famed *ge'onim* of Iraq and by the lesser-known incumbents of the Jerusalem Yeshiva.

Much of the extant correspondence is in Hebrew, a language that appears to have been adopted for gaonic letter-writing from at least the 10th century (Saadya Gaon) and that continued in common use until the second half of the 11th century, when, like the academies that championed it, it went into decline. It is likely that Hebrew served as a medium of commu-

nication for religious authorities from a much earlier period (at least in Egypt or Palestine), as a few tantalizing discoveries at Oxyrhynchus suggest (Mishor 1989:256), but the Genizah preserves only very few items of correspondence prior to the 10th century. Pastoral letters were intended to be read aloud to the scattered congregations in the diaspora, and therefore Hebrew was preferred to Arabic, since the former was a language suitable for recitation in the synagogue, and, in addition, its use bore a spiritual and nationalistic resonance befitting the official language of gaonic authority and testified to the confidence felt by these traditional Jewish institutions under Islamic rule.

The Cairo Genizah has preserved the Hebrew correspondence of Babylonian *ge'onim* from Saadya onwards (as either later recensions, contemporary copies for the purposes of promulgation, or as autograph manuscripts) and that of the Palestinian *ge'onim* from Josiah ben Aaron (d. 1025) until the eventual disappearance of the Jerusalem Yeshiva. The most prodigious letter-writer of the period, who left approximately one hundred letters in the Genizah, was Solomon ben Judah, *ga'on* of the Palestinian Yeshiva from 1025 to 1051. His correspondence shows a remarkable fluency, a surprising candor, and illuminates a highly colorful character.

While some correspondence was intended for only one recipient, usually a local leader or representative of the Yeshiva, many of the letters were intended to be read aloud to a congregation or select group. The writers took pains to produce letters that reflected favorably on their knowledge of Hebrew sources (first and foremost the Bible), their linguistic flair, and their appreciation for the literature of the day, principally poetry. They are not, however, merely literary artifices, but represent a homogenous, fluid idiom that had to convey a wide variety of information relating to the governance of scattered communities, the disputes and controversies of the day, and the economic realities facing the *ge'onim* as they sought to maintain their academies.

Most of the gaonic letters have been published by Mann (1920–1922; 1931) and Gil (1991; 1997); the language has been described by Outhwaite (2000).

## 1. VOCALIZATION

The majority of texts are entirely unvocalized, and when vowel signs do occur they usually serve to elucidate a rare or unfamiliar word, such as a proper noun. An exception is made, however, by the pretender to the gaonate of Jerusalem, Nathan ben Abraham (active in the first half of the 11th c.). Following his adoption of the title of *ga'on*, he adorns his correspondence with a variety of vowel signs. They are especially frequent in the opening poetic embellishments, marking the rhyming syllables, and are probably used to lend an air of gaonic authority to his letters, rather than to aid comprehension.

Where used, the principal system of vocalization is Tiberian, although Babylonian vowels can be found in correspondence from Iraq and in the copies of Babylonian letters made in Egypt (by, for instance, the local Babylonian dignitary Shemiah ben Elhanan). Again, the Palestinian pretender Nathan ben Abraham is exceptional, in that he not only attests Tiberian vowel signs, but also frequently uses Babylonian vowels, mixing both systems in the same letter and even on the same word (e.g., CUL T-S 13J31.1). His Babylonian vocalization superficially resembles the compound system, marking lines above many vowels; however, a close examination shows that the lines are used without reference to the nature of the syllable, and it appears to be a graphic device only, employed for effect (→ Vocalization, Babylonian).

Other reading signs are sparsely used: the Palestinian *ga'on* Josiah ben Aaron frequently distinguishes *šin* and *šin* with the diacritic dot (e.g., *ששים* *šašim* 'rejoicing', CUL T-S 13J14.10) and occasionally uses *dagesh* and *rafe*, but he is exceptional. Very common, however, is the use of supralinear dots (either single or multiple), lines or other symbols to mark abbreviations in frequent expressions, e.g., in the epistolary formula *קד' גד' כב' keb[od] ged[ullat] qed[ušsat]* 'the honorable, great, holy' (CUL Mosseri Ia.4, a letter in the hand of Solomon ben Judah, the Palestinian *ga'on*), and in titles, blessings, and common phrases.

## 2. ORTHOGRAPHY

The orthography displayed by gaonic correspondence is fuller than that of earlier traditions

of Hebrew, but the influence of the MT remains evident (→ Orthography: Biblical Hebrew). There is a lack of total conformity, and writers vary in their approach. *עיר הקדש* 'ir haq-qodeš 'the Holy City' is usually written without *waw*, for instance, yet Solomon ben Judah, who is otherwise orthographically conservative, regularly writes the *waw*, as does Daniel ben Azariah. The two extremes are best represented by the Palestinian *ge'onim* Nathan ben Abraham and Josiah ben Aaron: while both will customarily spell *o*, *u*, and long *i* vowels with vowel letters, they differ considerably over *ē*, short *i*, and the writing of consonantal *w*. For example, Nathan does not mark *ē* in a closed syllable with *yod*, yet spellings such as *יצילים* *yašilem* 'may He save them' (CUL T-S 13J14.10) occur in Josiah's correspondence. The semantic distinction perpetuated in Biblical Hebrew orthography between the spelling with and without *yod* of the ending of the singular and plural noun with suffixes (*מכתבנו* sing. vs. *מכתבינו* pl. both *miktābenu*) is maintained only by some of the writers, principally Solomon ben Judah, Nathan ben Abraham, and Sherira Ga'on, yet even then, is sometimes forgotten on feminine singular nouns, e.g., *תפלתינו* *teḫillatenu* 'our prayer' (Solomon ben Judah, CUL T-S AS 151.20).

## 3. MORPHOLOGY

*Pronouns and particles.* For the 1cs *אנכי* 'anokī and *אנחנו* 'anahnu are attested alongside the pronouns *אני* 'ani and *אנו* 'anu. While the archaic 1cs pronoun *אנכי* is sufficiently rare to indicate a marked usage, e.g., *אנכי מאד רציתי* 'anokī me'od rašiti 'I myself greatly wanted' (CUL T-S 13J16.24, Solomon ben Judah), the biblical *אנחנו* 'anahnu is used in free variation with *אנו* 'anu by many writers, e.g., in a letter by the 10th-century Babylonian *ga'on* Nehemiah ha-Kohen: *שאנחנו משלחים* še-'anahnu mešallehim 'that we sent' and *ואנו מבקשים* ve-'anu mebaqqešim (CUL T-S 12.851). For some, however, *אנחנו* apparently represents a higher register of language, as it is found only in formal epistolary phrases, giving way to *אנו* in the body text, e.g., Nathan ben Abraham.

The archaic 3cpl pronoun *המה* *hemma* is found alongside *הם* *hem*, particularly as a demonstrative, e.g., *הזהובים ההמה* *haz-zehubim ha-hemma* 'those dinars' (CUL T-S 16.275, Solomon ben Judah). Indeed, a wide range of



is particularly common in Babylonian sources, perhaps due to the influence of the Iraqi dialect of Arabic, e.g., *ואם יתעצלוּן העם מה יעשוּן*, *ve-ʿim yitʿasselun ha-ʿam ma yaʿasun haḳmehem* ‘and if the people are lazy, what shall their sages do?’ (CUL T-S 13J25.5, Sherrira Gaʿon). The jussive is frequently used in bestowing wishes for good fortune on correspondents. The *waw*-consecutive construction with the prefix conjugation is common, and employs the morphological jussive of middle-weak and, usually, the apocopated forms of ל"י (final *yod*) verbs.

The influence of Rabbinic Hebrew (RH) is felt in the frequent use of the ין -*in* ending on plural participles, in the Aramaizing forms of the verb היה *haya* ‘to be’ (תהא *tebe* and יהא *yebe*), in the form of infinitives like ליתן *litten* ‘to give’, ליקח *liqqah*, and לידע *ledaʿ* (alongside the BH equivalents), and the extensive use of the *nitpaʿal* stem. Indeed, the *hitpaʿel* is mainly limited to phrases drawn in whole or part from the Bible; in nearly all other cases the *nitpaʿal* occurs. This is a hybrid stem (and was probably pronounced *nitpaʿel*, but no vocalized forms occur in the letters) since the participle form takes the מת- *mit-* prefix of the BH *hitpaʿel* (→ Morphology: Rabbinic Hebrew).

Medieval features also found in contemporary poetry include a wider use of the *hufal* stem, particularly for the suffix conjugation of stative verbs, and the payṭanic conjugating of the suffix conjugation of the verb נגע *nagaʿ* as a middle weak, a common epistolary usage in Egypt and Palestine, but unknown in Babylon, e.g., *געה אגרתכם החקוקה בכסלו קובלים על*, *gaʿa ʿiggartekem ha-ḥaḳuqa be-ḳislev qoblim ʿal [...]* *gaʿa ʿiggartekem ha-ḥaḳuqa be-ḳislev qoblim ʿal [...]* *yešʿa ha-kohen* ‘the letter that you wrote in Kislev arrived, complaining about [...] Yeshua ha-Kohen’ (CUL T-S 12.328, Solomon ben Judah). Another medieval feature found across the corpus is the use of ו- as an alternative 3ms pronominal suffix on the prefix conjugation verb. Letter-writers from Egypt to Iraq attest this, which allows for a greater degree of assonance in florid prose, enabling the rhyming of nominal and verbal forms, e.g., *צור עזרו וצל סתרו*, *[yehi] šur ʿezro ve-šal sitro v-ʿaṭtero ve-yamšʿo ḥen ve-tiqvato* ‘[may] the Rock be his aid and his shelter’s shade, crown him and provide him with grace and hope’ (CUL T-S 13J14.5, Solomon ben Judah);

*מרי ורבנא ניסין ישמרו [...] ויאמצו* *mari ve-rabbana nissin yišmero v-ʿammešo* ‘our master and teacher Nissin, may He preserve him [...] and give him strength’ (CUL T-S 16.6, Nehemiah ha-Kohen).

#### 4. SYNTAX

Gaonic Hebrew retains much biblical syntax, including the *waw*-consecutive for narrating past events, e.g., *ואשאל ואשאל ואשנה* *va-ʿešal va-ʿešne* ‘I asked and I asked again’ (CUL T-S 16.275, Solomon ben Judah); *ויכלה קיץ* *vay-yikle qayiṣ* ‘and summer came to an end’ (CUL T-S 16.6, Nehemiah ha-Kohen); infinitival clauses (temporal, comparative), e.g., *ויהי בשאלם על הדבר* *va-yhi be-šolam ʿal had-dabar ha-ze* ‘and when they asked about this matter’ (CUL T-S 12.80, Solomon ben Judah). Though contrary to BH syntax, such clauses are usually followed by a suffix conjugation verb without *waw*. The influence of Late BH/RH syntax is strong, and can most clearly be seen in the wide variety of clauses constructed with *š-* and in the use of the infinitive construct with prefixed *l-*; both can be seen in this phrase from Nehemiah ha-Kohen: *מתוך שאי אפשר לנו מלכתוב* *mi-toḳ še-ʿi ʿepšar lanu mil-ḳtoḅ* ‘because it is impossible for us to write’ (CUL T-S 12.851). Beyond the simple past, Late BH/RH influence is felt in the tenses, such as the past habitual, e.g., *והיה רובו יוצא משכר החנויות אשר ברמלה* *ve-haya robo yoše miš-šekar ha-ḥanuyyot ašer be-ramla* ‘and it used to be that most of it [= money to pay the taxes] came from the rent of the shops in Ramla’ (JTS ENA 2804.8, Solomon ha-Kohen). A medieval feature also found in poetry of the period is the use of the relative *ha-* with finite verbs, e.g., *גודל הצער* *[godel] haš-šar ve-ʿošem ha-makka ha-hikkunu* ‘[the extent of] the grief and the might of the blow that struck us’ (CUL T-S 12.80); *השמועה הרעה ההגיעה* *haš-šemuʿa ha-raʿa ha-bagʿa* ‘the dreadful report that arrived’ (CUL T-S 13J31.8).

#### 5. LEXICON

There is little discernible influence of the Arabic vernacular on the lexicon of the gaonic correspondence. Three-quarters of the vocabulary is biblical in origin, with the remainder coming from rabbinic and talmudic sources, consisting

in particular of vocabulary related to finance, legal procedures, and religious practice. Where Arabic terms for particular concepts or items exist, and would occur in a contemporary Judeo-Arabic text, writers prefer a Hebrew word. Thus, for 'money order', Arabic *suftaja*, we find דיוקנא *diyogne* and for the 'poll tax', Arabic *jizya* or *jāliya*, we find biblical מס *mas*. A number of particular nouns, though not unique to correspondence, are characteristic of it: חמוד *hamud* 'son'; כתב *ketab* 'letter' (frequently instead of מכתב *miktav*); אמיתה *'amitta* 'truth'; חשש *hašaš* 'need, worry'.

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## Ga'ya

A *ga'ya* is a short vertical sign that is written under words in Tiberian Masoretic Bibles. The term is used in the early Masoretic sources (vocalized גַּעְיָה *ga'yā* and גִּיעְיָה *gī'yā*). It later came to be known as the מֶתֶג *meteg*, a term that was introduced by Yequti'el ha-Naqdan (first half of the 13th century) (ed. Gumpertz 1958) and is still widely used today. The *ga'ya* is part of the accent system and is generally only marked in manuscripts that have accent signs, but omitted in those that have only vocalization signs. The *ga'ya* sign is written beneath the consonant, generally to the left of vowel sign, though in some manuscripts it is

often written to the right of the sign. While in printed editions and in most manuscripts the sign is vertical, in a few manuscripts it is written slanting to the right slightly.

The patterns of marking of *ga'ya* differ among the manuscripts. The distribution of the sign in the late manuscripts was described by Baer (1869). These differ in some respects from what is found in the early manuscripts and even among the early manuscripts there are differences in the marking of certain categories of *ga'ya*, including between the Aleppo Codex (A) and the Codex Leningradensis (L). The most detailed studies of the *ga'ya* in the early manuscripts are those by Yeivin (1968:89–194; 1980:240–264).

In the early Masoretic sources the *ga'ya* was not regarded as one of the accents, but rather as a sign to denote the slowing down of the reading. It appears, however, that it acquired a musical motif of its own in some cases.

Yeivin classifies the *ga'ya* into two main groups:

- (i) Musical *ga'ya*. This type of *ga'ya* is related to the musical cantillation and generally marks some kind of secondary stress preceding the main accent. It is dependent on the syllable structure of the word and the type of accent that is adjacent to it.
- (ii) Phonetic *ga'ya*. This slows down the reading of vowels in various places to ensure the correct pronunciation of the word, usually to indicate that a following vowel should be made vocalic or to ensure that certain consonants were not slurred over.

### 1. MUSICAL GA'YA

The musical *ga'ya* may be divided into a variety of categories.

*Minor ga'ya*. This was marked on a short vowel in a closed syllable. In the early Masoretic sources it was referred to as 'minor *ga'ya*' (גַּעְיָה קטנה *ga'ya qetanna*). This seems to relate to the fact that the *ga'ya* lengthened the vowel to a lesser extent than when the *ga'ya* was marked on a long vowel, which was referred to as 'major *ga'ya*' (גַּעְיָה גדולה *ga'ya gedola*). Yequti'el ha-Naqdan used the term 'heavy *ga'ya*' (גַּעְיָה כבדה *ga'ya keveda*) to refer to the minor *ga'ya* and the term 'light *ga'ya*' (גַּעְיָה קלה *ga'ya qela*)