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ON WISDOM, CREATION, AND ANGELS:
A KARAITE COMMENTARY ON PROVERBS 8

ABSTRACT

Yefet ben ’Eli, a tenth-century Karaite exegete, discusses three major theological topics in his commentary on Proverbs 8: wisdom, creation, and angels. His treatment of these topics reflects a dialogue with contemporary Karaite thinkers, *muʿtazilite kalām*, and rabbinic midrash. In this article I trace the roots and motivations of his arguments back to these sources. I also trace his inner-biblical interpretation in light of the creation account in Genesis.

RÉSUMÉ

Yefet Ben ’Eli, exégète karaïte du dixième siècle, traite de trois sujets théologiques importants dans son commentaire sur Proverbes 8: la sagesse, la création et les anges. Son traitement de ces sujets reflète un dialogue avec des penseurs karaites contemporains, le *kalām muʿtazilite*, et le midraš rabbinique. Certains de ses commentaires ne peuvent être compris que si on les rattache à ces différentes sources. Son interprétation de Proverbes 8 est aussi fondée sur des rapprochements avec le récit de la création de la Genèse.

Introduction

Yefet ben ’Eli, a medieval Karaite exegete, lived in Jerusalem in the tenth century. He translated the entire Bible into Arabic and wrote a systematic

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1. This publication was prepared thanks to the DFG-DIP project *Biblia Arabica: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians and Muslims* (Project initiators: C. Adang, M. Polliack S. Schmidtke). My thanks to the British Library, the Israel National Library, the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France for the permission to use their resources. My thanks to Prof. Raymond Scheindlin for the discussions that led to the writing of this paper, to Nabih Bashir for sharing his expertise on the topic of angels, and to Prof. Meira Polliack for reading earlier versions of this article and for all her good advice.


doi: 10.2143/REJ.176.1.3209397
and methodological commentary in the same language on the entire Bible. His commentaries include introductions to most of the books of the Bible, and he comments on each verse following the biblical sequence. The

2. Yefet’s translation of the Bible is meant to complement his commentary.

commentaries are replete with comments on linguistics, halakha, theology, polemics, daily customs, history, and literary analysis of the biblical text.¹

Not only was Yefet a prolific author, he had great influence both in Karaite and Rabbanite circles, as attested by the numerous copies of his work extant today. Yefet maintained a literary dialogue with Saʿadiah Gaon, who was an older contemporary. Byzantine Karaites who translated his work into Hebrew helped introduce it to later Karaite and Rabbanite exegetes. Abraham ibn Ezra cites Yefet scores of times in addition to incorporating into his agreements with Rabbanite scholars. His work, like the work of other Rabbanite and Karaite sages of the time, was influenced by concepts of muʿtāzilite kalām. Despite his rejection of Rabbanite Judaism, Yefet acknowledges, whenever he deems appropriate, his agreement with Rabbanite scholars.


In his commentary on chapter 8 of Proverbs Yefet discusses three major theological themes: wisdom, creation, and angels. His analyses seem to be sparked and motivated by the works of other contemporary thinkers, both Jewish and Islamic, as well as by earlier traditions. In this paper I will examine Yefet’s commentary in light of the theology of *mutazilite kalām* concerning the essence of wisdom, the universe as a proof for the divine, and the rank assigned to the angels. I will also examine Yefet’s position on angels in comparison with other Karaite thinkers’ ideas concerning angels' existence, the time of their creation, and their rank in relation to humanity. I will further discuss the incorporation of early midraš in Yefet’s commentary on the creation of heaven and earth, the creation of angels, the role of wisdom at the time of creation, and the separation of water in the creation story. Finally, I will point to Yefet’s inner-biblical interpretation of this chapter in light of the creation story in Genesis.

In the introduction to his commentary on the book of Proverbs Yefet identifies the essence of the book as the expression of wisdom, but he asserts that Proverbs ought to be taken as a source for *halakha* as well. His commentary exhibits a mastery of a large set of hermeneutic devices, which he uses in order to tease out preferred meanings from the text, but also to identify their uses by the biblical author. One of Yefet’s main concerns is to highlight the cohesiveness of the book of Proverbs. He frequently explains the reasons for juxtaposing two or more verses next to each other. He also explains away contradictions and justifies repetitions in the text. He identifies metaphors and at times refines the distinction between the different types of metaphor. His commentary on Proverbs includes polemics against Islam and Christianity, but it more specifically targets philosophy in general


and the proponents of the *Dahriyya* in particular. Yefet devotes large sections to polemics against the study of secular sciences, and especially cosmology. He opposes the practice of using forbidden substances under the false pretense that they are remedies. Finally, he expresses disapproval of life in exile, condemning those who chose to stay there of being irresponsible and dismissive of their obligations.

Yefet, like other Jewish thinkers, absorbed and incorporated Islamic rationalism. Jewish theologians and exegetes, both Rabbanite and Karaite, were drawn to *mu‘tazilite kalām* because of the emphasis it put on rational investigation of theological matters, the role it attributed to human free will in shaping human history, and its insistence on divine unity and divine theology, among other principles, which all cohered with traditional Jewish tenets. *Mu‘tazilite kalām* offered a system of general principles that could be adopted into any monotheistic faith that was founded on the belief in one just and benevolent creator who communicates with humanity through prophetic revelations. By the ninth century, *mu‘tazilite* doctrines were so thoroughly integrated into Jewish thought and culture that they were regarded as authentically Jewish. Jewish theologians and exegetes, beginning with David b. Marwān al-Muqammi, incorporated kalām terminology in their own writings. By the time Yefet wrote his commentaries, *mu‘tazilite kalām* ...
was well integrated into Jewish thought. Thus, when he vehemently condemned learning from foreign books, he must have assumed that his theological tenets had authentic Jewish roots.\(^{15}\)

In his commentary on chapter 8 of Proverbs Yefet presents a concise version of his theological principles concerning creation, wisdom, and angels. He lets the biblical text guide him as he unfolds his thesis one verse at a time. By the time he embarked on the task of interpreting the book of Proverbs Yefet had already put forth his worldview concerning these topics in other exegetical passages. However, this chapter provided him with a new opportunity to revisit these fundamental issues as in the new light of this text.

In interpreting the first segment of the chapter, verses 1-21, Yefet identifies some of the characteristics of wisdom and emphasizes wisdom’s benefits for humanity. In his remarks on the middle segment, verses 22-31, he discusses creation, the role of wisdom with regard to creation, and wisdom’s place with regard to God. In addition, he comments on the creation of angels and their status in relation to humanity. In his commentary on this segment, Yefet points to the biblical author’s allusions to the story of creation in Genesis 1, unwrapping the verses’ inner-biblical exegesis. For the last segment, verses 32-36, Yefet unpacks the metaphors used to characterize wisdom, which center around the image of a parent-child relationship. Yefet expands this metaphor to include the teachings of the ancient sages who proclaimed monotheism.\(^{16}\)

At the end of this article I present Yefet’s translation and commentary on all of Proverbs 8, yet my discussion below focuses on his commentary on the middle segment.

Wisdom

The middle section of Proverbs 8 begins with verse 22, in which wisdom declares that “God \textit{qanani} (q-n-y) at the beginning of God’s path.” The verb \textit{qana} most commonly means “to buy,” “to acquire,” though it may also

\(^{15}\) \textsc{Sklare}, “The Reception of Mu’\-tazilism”, p. 23-24.

\(^{16}\) Yefet does not specify who these sages are; however, in his commentary on Proverbs 8:31 he points to a correlation between human wisdom and monotheism. Therefore, he must refer here also to the earliest sages to whom the proclamation of monotheism was attributed such as Job, Noah, and Daniel (see Ezek 14:14). See also Yefet’s introduction to his commentary on the book of Job, where he asserts that every nation, even in antiquity, had a circle of wise sages who proclaimed monotheism. Yefet considers Job one such sage, as he explains in his commentary on Job 1:1. See \textsc{Hussain}, \textit{Job}, p. 4-10.
means “to create.” It is the last meaning that most modern translators apply to this verse. In contrast, Yefet avoids using the verb “to create” and opts to translate qanani as malakan, meaning “owns me.” He explains his choice by asserting that when wisdom says qanani she does not mean it in the same sense as qonešamayim wa-ares, “creator of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19, 22), for wisdom was always known to God. Yefet regards wisdom not as a creation made by God, but rather as one of God’s attributes. Wisdom, he says, was with God before creation and before the existence of the universe, since wisdom is an essential attribute of God (al-ašāl). A common thread running throughout this entire biblical passage is the notion that wisdom was there before the universe came into being and before the creation process began. Yefet sees this as a natural conclusion that goes hand in hand with the idea that wisdom is a divine attribute.

Islamic theologians extensively discussed divine attributes, in particular in the circles of kalām and mu’tazila. The first principle of the mu’tazilites was the principle of the unification of God (tawḥīd), which holds that when discussing divine attributes it is not possible to separate between them and God as distinct entities. Thus, for example, God and God’s knowledge are one and the same. God’s knowledge, unlike human knowledge, is not acquired—rather, it is an eternal entity. Similarly, God and all of God’s attributes are one and in inseparable unity. It is therefore not possible to talk about the creation of knowledge, or wisdom, in mu’tazilite theology, as wisdom is an essential attribute of God. Both Rabbanite and Karaite scholars were influenced by Islamic doctrines of divine attributes and incorporated them in their own writings. Yefet’s introduction to his commentary on each of the biblical books opens with an invocation that mentions certain divine attributes chosen according to the main theme of the biblical text. Thus, in his introduction to Proverbs, Yefet describes God as the bestower of wisdom.


18. For example see NRSV: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work”; JPS: “The Lord created me at the beginning of His course.” See also a detailed discussion in M. V. FOX, Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, New Haven, 2006, p. 279-280.

19. It is interesting to note that Sa’adiah too refrains from translating this verse as “to create”, rather his rendition is (Allāh) ikhtara’nī: “(the Lord) had invented me.” JOSEPH QA’IFI (ed.), Mīl’il im Targum ha-Gaon Rabbeinu Sa’adah ben Yosef Fāyūmi 25’1 (Ktāb Ṭalab al-Ḥiknū) [Proverbs with Our Rabbi, the Gaon, Saadiah b. Yosef Fayyumi 25’1’s Translation and Commentary] (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1976, p. 77.

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(wāhib al-hikma). In his introduction to Genesis Yefet selects attributes that emphasize divine oneness and eternity, as well as the power to create.21

In his commentary on verse 27α (“When He established the heavens I was there”) Yefet adds another stratum to this idea, arguing that while wisdom existed before the universe was created, she will continue to exist throughout the duration of the universe. In other words, he calls attention to wisdom’s quality as eternal both with regard to the past and with regard to the future. Furthermore, in explicating verse 30, Yefet points to the marvels of creation as seen in God’s magnificent world. This verse, according to Yefet, implicitly alludes to the last three days of creation. He elucidates that wisdom was with God when God created the stars on the fourth day (Gen 1:14-19), the sea animals on the fifth (Gen 1:20-23), and the land animals on the sixth (Gen 1:24-25). Wisdom has never ceased to govern the world ever since the six days of creation. By means of the senses, humanity can witness the immaculate works of God, which are the reflection of God’s wisdom. This statement harks back to another doctrine that claims that because of God’s incorporeality God is invisible, and therefore, in order to have proper knowledge of God one must perceive God by the senses. Thus, seeing God’s creations amounts to an indirect vision of God. The method of establishing this as a “sound proof” is known as “the analogy of the imperceptible/invisible to the perceptible/visible.”22

While Yefet regards wisdom as a divine attribute, he also subscribes to the rabbinic notion that identifies wisdom with the Torah. According to Genesis Rabba, the Torah is equated with the same wisdom that is described in Proverbs 8. The rabbis quote Proverbs 8:30 to show that the Torah was God’s working tool when God created the world. According to this midraš, the Torah was created to serve as the blueprint by which God created the universe. The midraš explains by way of analogy that when a human king builds a palace he uses the skills of an architect. The architect, on his part,


employs plans and diagrams. So too, God consulted the Torah to create the world. Yefet echoes this notion at the end of his commentary on verse 30, saying, “and wisdom delighted in [all] that for she would say: ‘All this is for me and on my account.’” He repeats this again at the end of his commentary on verse 31, saying that the world was created for wisdom and that it is by wisdom that it was established.

By presenting these two very different ideas about the essence of wisdom — both that it is a divine attribute and that it is the Torah itself — Yefet seems to convey to his audience that one does not need to exclude one theory in favor of the other, and that both interpretations are valid.

Creation

In commenting on the middle section of Proverbs 8 Yefet underlines the numerous allusions that the biblical author makes to the story of creation in Genesis 1.

23. Genesis Rabba 1:1: “The Torah declares: ‘I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He.’ In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, ‘In the beginning God created (Genesis 1:1), beginning referring to the Torah, as in the verse, The Lord made me as the beginning of His way (Proverbs 8:22).’” H. Freedman and M. Simon (eds.), Midrash Rabbah, vol. 1: Genesis, London, 1983, p. 1. Robert Alter explains that “In rabbinic tradition, it (= the cosmic and cosmogenic prominence of Wisdom) was a trigger for the idea that God made the world by following the blueprint of the Torah, which pre-existent creation; and later the Kabbalah would elaborate this notion with theosophic apparatus.” He also suggests that the poem of Proverbs 8:22-31 provided a basis for the prose-poem about the Logos (“In the beginning there was a word...”) in the Gospel according to John. R. Alter, The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, A Translation with Commentary, New York, 2010, p. 230.

creation account, while remaining mindful of the poetry of Proverbs. Yefet follows the personified biblical representation of wisdom as a woman, as she retells the creation process from her vantage point. The main thrust of the poem is that she had existed before the world came into existence. When she says פֶּתַּחְתַּיָּדְרַח (“the beginning of his path”; v. 22) she means, according to Yefet, “the beginning of his creation,” which, he explains, corresponds to the creation of the heavens, earth, water, darkness, and wind, in accordance with Genesis 1:1-2. This, he says, corresponds to the first two days of creation, when the earth was still submerged in water. Both הַגָּלוֹת (“the great deep”) and אֲשֵׁר פָּתַת (“springs”) are mentioned in verse 24. Yefet calls our attention to the sequence: first the earth is mentioned (v. 23), then the great deep, and then the springs. Indeed, the same sequence is found in Genesis 1:2.

Expounding verses 25-26, Yefet explains that wisdom divided the world into two parts: dry land and water. Dry land, he explains, is made up of four different types of terrain. The first constitutes mountains and hills (v. 25), which serve to support the universe just as pillars support a building. The second is the wilderness represented by אָרֶץ (“earth”; v. 26), which constitutes the uninhabitable territories of the world. The third is הָרָבָּה (“fields”; v. 26), which Yefet suggests are roads people use for traveling. And the fourth is אֶשֶׂר אֶפֶּשֶׂר (“the world’s first bits of soil”; v. 26), which Yefet interprets as the inhabited urban areas where humanity


25. Alter explains that Proverbs 8:22-31 is a poem of cosmic framework in which wisdom celebrates her role as God’s intimate before God embarked on the creation of the world. See Alter, The Wisdom Books, p. 230. Indeed, the poem of Proverbs 8:22-31 retells the story of creation not for its own sake or as praise for God, but rather as a glorification and celebration of wisdom’s presence and preeminence throughout the process of creation. See Fox, Proverbs 1-9, p. 281. See also Y. Moshe Qimhi’s commentary on Proverbs 8:27-29 in F. Talmage, The Commentaries on Proverbs of the Kimhi Family (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1990, p. 197-198.

26. Yefet’s understanding of the word derekh (“way”) as creation is based on four cases in which the word derekh implies creation in the biblical text. See note 184 on page 81.

27. Yefet discusses the creation of the first five elements in his commentary on Genesis 1:2, where he asserts that these five were created ex nihilo in the first moment of creation. See Ben-Shammai et al., Manuscripts, p. 109, 161. See also Ben-Shammai, Doctrines, p. 178-179.

28. Attention to structure and sequence is one of the hallmarks of Yefet’s work in particular and of Karaites in general. See discussion in Sasson, Methods, p. 181-187; M. Goldstein, Karaites Exegesis in Medieval Jerusalem: The Judeo-Arabic Pentateuch Commentary of Yāṣūf ibn Nūḥ and Abū al-Faraj Hārūn, Tübingen, 2011, p. 87-118.
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dwells and civilization thrives. Wisdom, he explains, reminds us throughout that she existed before all this came into being.  

In interpreting verse 27, Yefet points to its inner-biblical allusions to the creation of the heavens. Yefet asserts that the heavens were created at the same time as the earth, a statement that echoes a debate recorded in Genesis Rabba concerning the sequence of the creation of heaven and earth. According to the midraš, the school of Shammai contended that the heavens were created first, whereas the school of Hillel asserted that the earth was. The midraš concludes with a statement by R. Simeon b. Yoḥai that heaven and earth were created simultaneously, like an earthen pot and a lid. Yefet’s opinion appears to be in dialogue with this rabbinic debate.

With regard to the firmament, Yefet points to a parallel between the second hemistich of verse 27 and the description of the stretching of the firmament in Genesis 1:6-8. He then explains the process of fixing the orbits. When the earth was first created it assumed a state marked by stillness. This state, Yefet says, is distinguished from the second state in which the orbits began to rotate around the earth. Yefet uses the phrase הָלְלַ וּדָוָרָאְנִיתָה to denote earth’s second state. By syntax alone it could be understood as the state of the earth’s rotation. However, this is highly unlikely in light of Yefet’s commentary on Genesis 1:2, in which he quotes Isaiah 40:22 saying that the wordHAL, circle,

must indicate one of two things, either the rotation of the earth around itself, but this is impossible, for we only see it moving during earthquakes, when its surface moves; or it indicates the rotation of the orbit of the heavens... whose rotation stabilizes the earth.... Since it is not possible to assume thatHAL, circling of the earth, refers to the earth itself, we must refer it to the orbit, for there is no third possibility.

29. See a brief review of the history of interpretation of the phrases mentioned in verses 25-26 in Fox, Proverbs 1-9, p. 283.
31. This translation is based on Ben-Shammai et al., Manuscripts, p. 111, 162. Jewish interest in the study of astronomy in the early Islamic period arose for several reasons. The main reason was the attraction to Islamic culture and the willingness and openness of Muslims to cooperate in scientific matters with their non-Muslim subjects. A more practical reason was the role astronomy played in determining the calendar, especially in light of the disputes between Rabbanite and Karaites on this matter. Some Jews, such as Masʿallah (d. ca. 815), Sanad ibn ʿAlī (lived in the ninth century, and served as an astronomer in al-Maʾmūn’s court), and Saḥlah ibn Bīr al-Yahūdī (early ninth century), reached prominence in the study of astronomy in the early Islamic period. Saʿādiah, and later Maimonides, include writings on astronomy in their works. In his commentary on The Book of Creation Saʿādiah introduces the study of astronomy approvingly. See B. R. Goldstein, “Astronomy and the Jewish Community in Early Islam”, Aleph 1 (2001), p. 17-57 (24-26, 32-42).
In his commentary on Genesis 1:1-2 we find some complementary information. There he says that the heavens are made up of orbits that are mounted one on top of the other and that they surround the entire earth. Thus earth, water, wind, and darkness are found in the inner side of the orbits, while their outer side reaches the end of the universe.\(^{32}\) The rotation of the heavenly orbits secures the earth in its position, and allows it to be placed in the center of the orbits without having to physically touch them.\(^{33}\) The last assumption is consistent with Yefet’s assertion mentioned above (verse 25) that the role of hills and mountains is to support the earth.\(^{34}\) Yefet’s cosmological descriptions are reminiscent of a major tenet of Ptolemaic astronomy, which is the belief that the earth is the center of the universe, that it is motionless, and that celestial bodies move around it.\(^{35}\)

Yefet further explains, in light of the allusion to the creation story in Genesis 1, that it was necessary to establish the orbits on water rather than on land, because when they were created, on the second day, the earth was still immersed in water. God fixed the firmament (וקְדָשִׁים) in the middle between the higher heavens and the earth.\(^{36}\) It was securely fixed in its place to prevent it from tilting to any of the six directions. Yefet regards verse 28 as an allusion to Genesis 1:7, where on the second day of creation God separated between the water under the firmament and the water above the firmament. Our exegete comments on the separation of the water saying that this was only possible because that water was solidified and amenable to such a division. This explanation harks back to a rabbinic midraš recorded in Genesis Rabba that argues that the division of the water was enabled only because the water was in a solid state.\(^{37}\)

\(^{32}\) BEN-SHAMMAI et al., Manuscripts, p. 100-101, 156.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 110, 113, 161-162, 163. Sa’adiah too discusses the notion that rotation of the orbits began at a certain moment after creation. According to him it took place sometime within the six days of creation. See M. ZUCKER, Saadya’s Commentary on Genesis (Hebrew), New York, 1984, p. 29, 214.

\(^{34}\) The dominant theories in medieval astronomy were based on Greek astronomy, and in particular on Ptolemy’s Almagest. GOLDSTEIN, “Astronomy”, p. 22.


\(^{36}\) Yefet addresses the notion of higher heavens in the beginning of his commentary on Genesis 1:1, where he lists four things that humans cannot discover with their senses. These things, he contends, had to be relayed through prophecy. First on the list is the higher heavens, which were placed above the firmament. See BEN-SHAMMAI et al., Manuscripts, p. 87-88, 145-146.

\(^{37}\) “AND GOD SAID: LET THERE BE A FIRMAMENT, etc. Our Rabbis said the following in the name of R. Hanina, while R. Phinehas and R. Jacob b. R. Bun said it is in the name of R. Samuel b. Nahman: When the Holy One, blessed be He, ordered, LET THERE BE A FIRMAMENT IN THE MIDST OF THE WATER, the middle layer of water solidified, and the nether heavens and the upper heavens were formed. Rab said: [God’s] handiwork [the heavens] was in fluid
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Yefet notes that verse 29 (“when He assigned marks for the ocean”) alludes to the third day of creation, when God separated the water from dry land (Gen 1:9). He explains that God assigned a border to the ocean never to be crossed, which made the separation possible. By pointing out allusions to the creation story Yefet anchors the description of creation implied in Proverbs 8 in the text in Genesis 1. He further uses it as a foundation with which to explain wisdom’s divine position and her role in the creation process. While his discussions of creation are in dialogue with midraš, and with mu’tazilite doctrines, he also expresses contemporary conventions in the study of astronomy.

Angels

The Karaites participated and expanded dialogues and debates on angels that had been raging since antiquity and continued into the Middle Ages. According to the tenth-century Karaite scholar Jacob al-Qirqisânî, Benjamin al-Nahâwandî, an earlier Karaite theologian and leader, believed that God only created one angel, who created the entire world, performed miracles, and administered the prophets. Al-Nahâwandî adduced the existence of this creating angel in order to account for the physical attributes of God mentioned in the Bible—the creating angel embodies all anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible. His point of departure was Genesis 1:26, “Let us make humankind in our image.” Al-Nahâwandî denied the possibility that God has an image, and attributed this image to the creating form and on the second day it congealed.” Freedman and Maurice, Midrash Rabbah, p. 27. The same explanation is found in most medieval commentaries. Sa’adiah includes it in his commentary on Genesis 1:6. See Zucker, Saadya’s Commentary, p. 222. Rashi too includes it in his commentary on Genesis 1:6. See M. L. Katznelenbogen (ed.), Torat Hayyim: Hamishka hummetse Tora ‘im haphtarot [Torah of Life: Five Books of Torah with Haphtarot] (Hebrew), vol. 1, Sefer Be-re’shit, Jerusalem, 1986, p. 13. David Qimhi quotes the entire midraš from Genesis Rabbah in his commentary on Genesis 1:6. Ibid., p. 13-14. Some medieval scientists understood the creation of the firmament and the placing of water above it in a different way. R. Hayyim Israeli, who lived in Spain in the fourteenth century wrote a scientific treatise on this topic. For him most of the water is found under the firmament, whereas the water above consists of the atmosphere, where all the meteorological phenomena take place. His relative, R. Isaac Israeli, also explains that the upper water is not real water, but rather represents the heaven and its content. The latter disputes earlier notions of the firmament, including Sa’adiah’s. See T. Y. Langemann, “‘The Making of the Firmament’: R. Hayyim Israeli, R. Isaac Israeli and Maimonides” (Hebrew), Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 7 (1988), p. 461-476 (462-463, 468-469).
As further related by al-Qirqisânî, Daniel al-Qûmîsî, a Karaite exegete and contemporary of al-Nahâwândî, denied the existence of angels altogether. Al-Qirqisânî speculates that al-Qûmîsî’s opinion was a reaction to al-Nahâwândî’s creating angel. Yefet’s view on angels is similar to al-Qirqisânî’s. They both believed that angels serve God in praise. Indeed, they serve as God’s agents, as messengers to the prophets, in performing miracles, redeeming the righteous, and punishing the wicked. In his commentary on Daniel 11:1, Yefet defends the position that angels do exist. This passage seems to engage in the polemical debate, and it is likely that it is a reaction to both al-Nahâwândî and al-Qûmîsî. His main argument is based on the fact that angels are mentioned and described in Scripture, but he also says that their existence cannot be denied by reason. Angels do not have the ability to create because they themselves were created. They do


40. BEN-SHAMMAL, Doctrines, vol. 1, p. 286.

41. The principle that governs the idea that no created creature can create is related to the mu’tazilite tenet of the unity of God (see supra note 41). ʿAbd al-Jabâr, the tenth-eleventh-century mu’tazilite theologian, dedicates an entire volume to the Creator in his magnum opus, al-Mughnî. He asserts that no entity other than God can create, since creation is one of the essential attributes of God. If there were another entity in the universe that was able to create, that would negate the principle of the unity of God, as the two would share the same attributes. Yet, this is not possible, since divine attributes are unique to God and distinguish God from any other entity. What’s more, sharing divine attributes with another entity would lead to išrâk, the belief in more than one God. In addition, if there were two creating entities in the universe, it would inevitably cause a clash between the two. Such a clash would eventually result in one entity defeating the other. The last argument is based on the mu’tazilite principle of al-tamânuʾ (= “the impossibility of equal multiple ‘owners’ of the universe who control it with harmony.” This definition is taken from A. A. AHMAD, The Fatigue of the Sârî’a, New York, 2012, p. 92). See ʿAbd al-Jabâr b. Ahmad al-Aṣâbâbî, al-Mughnî fi abwâb al-tawḥîd wal-ʿaṭlî, vol. 4, Cairo, 1965, p. 241-276. Saʿādîah discusses the principle of al-tamânuʾ in The Book of Beliefs and Opinions. He asserts that God is the only entity that can create, and he links this idea to statements found in Scripture. See SAʿĀDIH, Kitâb al-Mukhtâr fil-Amânhût wa-l-Iṣāqāt [The Book of Beliefs and Opinions] (Hebrew), JOSEPH
not expire after fulfilling their mission; rather, they remain and serve by praising God. He also mentions that angels are assigned different hierarchical ranks.\textsuperscript{42} In other passages Yefet posits that angels are free of human desires,\textsuperscript{43} that they do not need to perform commandments,\textsuperscript{44} and that the core substance from which angels are made is either fire or air.\textsuperscript{45}

A debate whose origins are found in midrash deals with the question of when the angels were created. Some midrashic sages say that they were created on the second day of creation, while others contend that it occurred on the fifth day:

R. Yohanan said: The angels were created on the second day, as it is said, \textit{Who layest the beams of Thine chambers in the waters} (Psalms 104:3), and it is written, \textit{Who makest the spirits Thine angels} (Psalms 104:4). R. Hanina said: The angels were created on the fifth day, as it is written, \textit{And fowl fly above}


\textsuperscript{42} Yefet’s commentary on Daniel 11:1 can be found in \textit{Margoliouth, Daniel}, p. 56-57, 111-113. See also \textit{Sirat, History}, p. 47-49.

\textsuperscript{43} Commentary on Psalms 103:14, as presented in \textit{Ben-Shammai, Doctrines}, vol. 1, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 291. In his commentary on Exodus 3:2 Yefet says:

\begin{quote}
משה או אלקלעדים במעדים מפליך קמך או במעדים של מרחץ וחוזר חצרות מעריך אשלים (הלכה ד”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה ד”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה ד”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה ד”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסודים (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסod (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסod (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסod (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חניך) אשלים יסod (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnید (הלכה D”, של小额贷款 Roku אלוחא קפרא הלומדpanse אלים פפל חnirical (SP RNL EV R I 0054 ((42h-45a)).

Know that some angels are made of fire and some of wind, as it says “You make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers” (Ps 104:4). Thus, they can be sustained in the wind with no need for the earth to diminish their bodies. Those who are made of fire stand before the glory of God, as the saying “fire and flame your ministers”, while those who are made of the wind God sends to earth for matters related to humans. The angel that was revealed to Moses was one of the most exalted. Know that the master of the universe did not show Moses the form of the angel. He (Moses) noticed him but he was surrounded by fire all around him and his shape was not revealed to Moses.

For a discussion of al-Qirqisānī and Yefet’s approach to angels see \textit{Ben-Shammai, Doctrines}, vol. 1, p. 279-299. See also \textit{Sirat, History}, p. 38-54.
the earth (Genesis 1:20), and it is written, And with twain he did fly (Isaiah 6:2).46

According to the rabbinic sages, if the creation of angels was part of the creation of the celestial bodies, then it is reasonable to assume that they were created by the second day. However, if they were created together with all other winged creatures, then it would have occurred on the fifth day. In his commentary on Proverbs 8 Yefet makes only a few important, albeit concise, statements concerning aspects of the debate over angels.47 However, twice in this work Yefet asserts that angels were created early. Remarkingly, twice in his commentary on Genesis 1:3, where he says that God created the angels along with the first elements—the heavens, earth, water, darkness, and wind—on the first day of creation. This is consistent with his commentary on Genesis 1:3, where he cites an anonymous exegete with whom he agrees, who asserts that the angels were created on the first day of creation.48

Another topic of debate found in both medieval Jewish and Islamic sources was the question of the hierarchy between angels and humans. For example, a midrash found in Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer describes the angels asking God not to create Adam as he will turn out to be corrupt. God defends the creation of Adam by showing to the angels that Adam knows more than they do, as Adam can recite the names of all creatures, whereas they

46. FREEDMAN and MAURICE, Midrash Rabbah, p. 24.
47. It is possible that Yefet assumes that the reader is familiar with his commentaries on other parts of Scripture in which he elaborates on these topics, therefore his discussions here are brief.
48. According to the anonymous exegete that Yefet cites in his commentary on 1:3, when God created the first creations, the heavens, earth, water, darkness, and wind, there were no sentient beings in the world yet. Therefore God did not say anything before God created them. The creation of first five entities was followed by the creation of the light. This creation was introduced by “then God said,” indicating that at that point there were already sentient beings present. Those must have been the angels, who must have been created along with the first five entities. BEN-SHAMMAI et al., Manuscripts, p. 114-117, 164-165. In his commentary on Genesis 1:5 Yefet further implies that he believes that the angels were created on the first day of creation. Here too he presents an anonymous opinion that suggested, on the basis of Psalms 104:3-4, that the angels were created on the second day, after the creation of the firmament. It is possible that Yefet alludes here to Sa’adia. BEN-SHAMMAI et al., Manuscripts, p. 140, 178. See also ZUCKER, Saadya’s Commentary, p. 31, 219. See also D. LASKER, “The Philosophy of Judah Hadassi the Karaite” (Hebrew), Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought 7 (1988), p. 477-492 (488); Y. ERDER and M. POLLACK, “The Karaite Canon in the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries” (Hebrew), in Y. SHAVIT (ed.), Canon and Holy Scriptures, Tel-Aviv, 2009, p. 165-210 (174).
cannot. Several versions of a similar story appear in the commentaries of medieval Islamic scholars, such as Muqāṭil and Ṭabaṭar. According to the Islamic rendition, it was God who taught Adam the name of all creatures. God then asked the angels to say the names but they admitted that they could not, whereupon God, commanded Adam to tell the angels the names of all creatures.

Both al-Qirqisānī and Yefet held that angels are superior to humans. Al-Qirqisānī says that if God entrusts the salvation of humans into the hands of other humans, such as Othniel son of Kenaz (Judg 3:9) and Ehud son of Gera (Judg 3:15), how much more so would God be likely to entrust the salvation of humans into the hands of angels, implying that the latter are superior to the former. Yefet discusses this debate in several places. In his commentary on Genesis 1:26 he says,

People are not in agreement as to the rank of the angels. Some say that they (i.e., the angels) are inferior to Adam, adducing the argument that Adam has qualities which angels lack, and that whatever is to be found in angels is likewise to be found in Adam, since he is the microcosm. Because, therefore, Adam surpasses the angels in eminence, he becomes the most important of created beings. We, however, say that the angels are of the higher rank than he, for (the Psalmist) says, “Thou hast made him lower than angels” (Ps 8:6).

In his exegesis of Psalm 8:6 Yefet says,

The phrase “You have made him little less” indicates that angels occupy a higher rank compared with humans. This is in opposition to (the opinion of) David ben Marwān who contends that humans are superior to angels.

Yefet mentions David ben Marwān, also known as al-Muqammīs, as one of those who regard humans as superior to angels. In his commentary on


52. As published in S. MUNK, Mêlanges de philosophie juive et arabe, Paris, 1859, p. 475, n. 2. The translation is according to BERNBAUM, Hosei, p. xvi-xvii. See also BEN-SHAMMAI, Doctrines, vol. 2, p. 102.

Psalm 89:6, Yefet lists several attributes that angels possess that render them superior to humans. Angels are devoid of desires, they do not produce impurity, God equips them with greater potential than humans, and they declare God’s glory and praise God at all times.\textsuperscript{54} The difficulty in Yefet’s position stems from the fact that angels are shaped like humans. Addressing this difficulty in his interpretation of Ezekiel 1:26, Yefet says, apologetically, that even though God’s glory is superior to that of humans, its shape is similar to that of humans.\textsuperscript{55}

In his commentary on Proverbs 8 Yefet briefly revisits the debate regarding the hierarchy between Adam and the angels. Interpreting verse 23, Yefet says that upon the creation of the angels God appointed wisdom to govern them, meaning that the angels were created as sentient beings. He reiterates in his remarks on verse 31 that when God created the angels God immediately bestowed wisdom upon them. For a while, therefore, they were the only creatures who enjoyed the benefit of wisdom. Then God created Adam. Adam, he says, lagged behind the angels with regard to wisdom. Upon creating Adam, however, God bestowed wisdom upon him too, and, ever since the creation of humanity, both angels and humans have shared wisdom among themselves. By lagging, no doubt, he means that angels have some advantage over humanity with regard to wisdom.

Conclusion

In his commentary on Proverbs 8 Yefet addresses several theological issues concerning wisdom, creation, and angels. While he stresses the mut’azilite notion that wisdom is a divine attribute and, therefore, does not belong to the category of created entities, he also echoes rabbinc midraš that views wisdom as the Torah, which served as the blueprint by which God created the world. Yefet’s main focus is on the wording and intent of the biblical text. He guides the reader through the poetic retelling of the creation account found in Proverbs 8, and deconstructs the text in light of the portrayal in Genesis 1, in a form of inner-biblical exegesis.

\textsuperscript{54} Ben-Shammai, Doctrines, vol. 1, p. 298-299.
\textsuperscript{55} Yefet’s commentary on Ezekiel 1:26 as quoted in ibid., p. 298:
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His discussion of the creation account attests to his familiarity with rabbinic midrash. His commentary seems to be in dialogue with the midrashic debate on heaven’s versus the earth’s primacy in creation. He also draws on midrash in his account of the separation of the water in the story of creation. Yet, at the same time, his understanding of the universe is based on Ptolemaic astronomy, reflecting familiarity with the medieval discipline of cosmology.

His discussion of angels can be contextually understood within the framework of three major theological questions of his time: do angels exist, and if they do, when were they created, and what is their rank compared with humanity? Yefet’s approach to these questions engages with contemporary Karaite thinkers, Muslim theologians, and the sages of rabbinic midrash.

Yefet uses his exegesis of this chapter of Proverbs to champion his thesis and participate in the ongoing debates related to these theological themes. His commentaries serve as dialogues and polemics motivated and triggered by the sources mentioned above. Yefet’s commentary on Proverbs 8, multifaceted and rich, reflects the role of the biblical interpreter, as he understood it; namely to bring to light a plethora of methods and approaches geared towards understanding the text and establishing of its correct meaning.

Proverbs 8 — Translation and Commentary

56. This edition was prepared according to several manuscripts (see description below). MS London British Library Or 2553 (BL1) is the oldest manuscript dated to the eleventh century. This manuscript is written in Arabic script. All other manuscripts are dated to a later time and are written in Hebrew script. In order to reflect the manuscripts accurately I have retained the original writing system of each manuscript.

ON WISDOM, CREATION, AND ANGELS

(20) [א] | (4) הַיֹּאמֶר אֶל הַנַּעַר הוֹדוֹא, וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: הַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה [כְּלַיִם]: 60 אֲנָדָי וְאָסְגְּרוּנִי אֶל בְּנֵי אָדָם: הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 61 הַיְּבִירוֹ נְבָעָה וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב. 63

(21) [א] | (5) הַיְּבִירוֹ נְבָעָה וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: מְיַעֵר אֶלָי רְעֹלָב: 61 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

(22) [א] | (6) שְׁמַע קֶם נְבָעָה וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: אִם שַׁעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 64 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 65 אִם שַׁעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 66

(23) [א] | (7) כַּלֵּמִית מִנַּעַרְךָ וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

(24) [א] | (8) שְׁמַע קֶם מִנַּעַרְךָ וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

(25) [א] | (9) [א] | (4) הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 62

(26) [א] | (10) כַּלֵּמִית מִנַּעַרְךָ וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

(27) [א] | (11) כַּלֵּמִית מִנַּעַרְךָ וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

(28) [א] | (12) כַּלֵּמִית מִנַּעַרְךָ וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

(29) [א] | (13) כַּלֵּמִית מִנַּעַרְךָ וּלְאָבִיתָן כְּלַיִם: 62 הֲלֹא יַעֲמֹר אֵלָי רְעֹלָב? 63

60. [A, P, SP6: 140] [א, P, SP6: 140] [A, P, SP6: 140]


64. [A, P, SP6: 144] [A, P, SP6: 144] [A, P, SP6: 144]


(14) אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ: לֹא הָיִיתָ אֶלֶּה, אֶלָּא אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ.
(15) לֹא יָדַעְתָּ בִּפְנֵי יָהֳעַקְבִּי בְּיָדָם חֲדָשִׁים.
(16) בְּיָדָם שֵׁרֵי וְיוֹדְעֵי כְּלֵי-פְּשֵׁם צִדְקָם: בַּיּוֹם יָדְעוּ אֶלֶּה אֶלֶּה.

A. creation, i.e., creation: thereby. צִדְקָם אֶלֶּה אֶלֶּה: אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ.

C. creation, i.e., creation: thereby. צִדְקָם אֶלֶּה אֶלֶּה: אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ.

(17) קָרַב אָסַף וְשָׁמֵעִי וָאָגֵדְתֵנִי: אֲנִי אֲסַפְּרֵנִי וָאָגֵדוּנִי נָטָנִי.
(18) רֹאִיתִי אָסַף וְשָׁמֵעִי וָאָגֵדוּנִי נָטָנִי: אֲנִי אֲסַפְּרֵנִי וָאָגֵדוּנִי נָטָנִי.
(19) בֹּלֵא פִּקְרֵי מַחֲחֵרִים וְזֶרַע הָאֱלֹהִים מְקַפֵּקְתָנּוּ נְבָטָתִי: וְלֹא מְגַלֵּל פָּרָה מְן אֲלֹהִים אֲלֹהִים:
(20) אָסַף אָסַף וְשָׁמֵעִי וְאָגֵדוּנִי נָטָנִי: אֲנִי אֲסַפְּרֵנִי וָאָגֵדוּנִי נָטָנִי.

C. creation, i.e., creation: thereby. צִדְקָם אֶלֶּה אֶלֶּה: אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ.

(21) תַּחְתִּי הַדַּבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעַּל מִהְמָנָתָם שֵׁם בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.
(22) הָאֱלֹהִים מַעַּל מִהְמָנָתָם שֵׁם בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.
(23) מִשְׁמַעְתָּ נְבָטָתִי מַעַּל מִהְמָנָתָם שֵׁם בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.
(24) אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעַּל מִהְמָנָתָם שֵׁם בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.
(25) מִשְׁמַעְתָּ נְבָטָתִי מַעַּל מִהְמָנָתָם שֵׁם בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.

A. creation, i.e., creation: thereby. צִדְקָם אֶלֶּה אֶלֶּה: אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ.

(26) דְּרֵעוֹל נָשָׁה אֱלֹהִים בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.
(27) דְּרֵעוֹל נָשָׁה אֱלֹהִים בָּאָבֶן שֵׁם דָּרֶם שְׁמֵהּ.

A. creation, i.e., creation: thereby. צִדְקָם אֶלֶּה אֶלֶּה: אֲנִי הַדַּבֵּר לְךָ.
(28) Finally, to be brought into full operation: the works of wisdom and understanding.

(29) There is no need to enter into the intricacies of the various solutions.

(30)[r] The argument is that the things of wisdom are not to be understood by the mind, but by the heart.

(31) Then the works of wisdom are surely the works of grace and of knowledge.

(32) For the passage in Deuteronomy 4:8, compare Psalms 19:10.

(33) [A] Ps 47:8. See also Ps 47:8. For notice a metathesis: חָסַד > חָסֵד.


ON WISDOM, CREATION, AND ANGELS

19586.REJ.2017.1-2_03_Sasson.indd   71
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80. [Proph. 3:14.
81. [Proph. 3:15.
82. [MT: סֵנָע.
83. [Proph. 15:22.
84. [Exod. 31:18.
85. [A. B. BL.2, P, SP6: חֲתֹם מִשָּׁמַע בּ.
86. [Deut. 2:18. 
87. [A. B. BL.2, P, SP6: קֹדֶשׁ מְשֻׁפָּט.
88. [סְמֻאָא.
يا يcz مصافا ومشافع مثل أربهم على السلم. ثم قالت لهنريل اوهاي يش تشتركي التواب الدنيا لأن فنطل يش تعل علي عبارات وأمور الآخرة باقية. وكما قال إيلاء لثب ين واللإفر مات أو والأمر 97 في النبأ مع الدنيا يقوله 98 عثر وخباوي إني هن عائلي وصاقنا هو الذي ذكره. 99 في هذا الفسق وذلك أن قولها عضر وخباوي إني عرفت أن هذه الإرسال عتقه ومن أن كنها في 99 وترى 99 بقبل خلاقته ومنه هو ريشيث درخائي إيل 98. هن إيلاء قوصوت. 99 div كي خي درخائي مشابهة 100 هذه كنها القصد بها إلى المخلقات. 101 ولل ترد بقولها قانانية نفقهها 102 مي قوني شامام وأيام 103 لأن الحكمتها لم تزل معلومة عن الله وإنما إرزدت به إني 104 سائحة للموجودات ون신 خلق العالم فيه الأصل ونعومه لقالها قانى فمنه وقولها فنطل ريشيث دركو تعني. كند أعمل عقولها قامب وقلل جمله بيساطها فيما 106. وترى أيضا أنها تولد إلى الشيا إلى خلقته 107 ريشيث وهي شامام وأيام وحومج وورج وذلك قات مبار لأنها معلم وممني نرموع فاربدت به عند ما أوعد الله الكليات فعرفت الله بالحكمة التي فيها فقط ورد عليهن 108 معلومة ولوقتها ومقدمي اصر تشير إلى اليومين المتقدمين قبل أن تتكشف الأرض في اليوم الثالث. ثم قالت إذن النطول سماعتها كما 109 ذكرت الأرض ثم ذكرت النهموم والمعيابون تشير إلى العيون التي تخرق في البحر، وهي ينفون الأرض فعرفت أنها كانت موجودة وليس هي من هذه. ثم قالت نظيرهم يطورها عند لعاب عرس وحوصوت. 111 إلى المواضع التي كانت عبسة كنها فصمت الأرض على

89. A, B, BL2, P: +
90. A, B, BL2, P. SP6: لم هن
91. إيلاء
92. هو الذي ذكرته "ذكره"
93. A, B, BL2, P: +
94. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: لم
95. "ذكره"
96. إيلاء
97. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: +
98. A, B, BL2, P: +
99. إيلاء
100. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: لم
101. إيلاء
102. إيلاء
103. A, B, BL2, P: +
104. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: لم
105. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: +
106. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: +
107. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: لم
108. A, B, BL2, P, SP6: لم
109. إيلاء
110. إيلاء
111. إيلاء
فسمين 112 بعضها تهوموت [22 ك] و معيانوت 113 وبعضها يانس قسمت 114 الأرب
الباحسة على أربعة أقسام فالأول منها 115 جان نواب وهي مثل الأعمدة لبني، ومما
ب此基础上 بصل فيها قالت أرب، ومنها طرق 116 سلسل النس في، 117 و فيها
فانت و حوحوصوت ومن ندي وضعية بсылها الأس في فيها قالت وروش عفوروت تينب
فعرف أن قيل إن 118 تنص الحرام محوجة. ثم قالت
باهجته شامام شام ين تشير بذلك 120 إلى السما التي خلفت بالأرض كانها ذكرت
إلا أنها كانت لم يكن عالما ثم قالت أني موجودة أيضا مع وجود المخلوقات، وقولها
بفحوه خوع عن في تهوم تشير به إلى الحلال الثانى 121 بعد خلقها وذلك أن عتم
خلقه 122 غير كان دورانها وقالت عن في تهوم لأنه دار الفلك على وجه الالان
الأرض كانت غارقة في الما ليس منها شيء ضار. ثم قال النص صاحبهم تشير
إلى الرفع الذي خلفه في اليوم الثاني ومعنى قوله بها هو تنيه في نمط بين
السماء الفوقانة وبين الأرض لا يميل إلى إحدى 124 المست 125 جهات 126 فعرفت أنها
كانت موجودة أيضا في ذلك الوقت وقولها باعوز عينوت 22 ك [127 تعود إلى]
كان النص بعد قوي على الأرض وإن كان قد تقسم فتعطم فيه أصل الراقين ومتنم فيه.
الأرض فلذي كان فوق 128 الأرض كان كيفا جدا فانذاقلا أنت عفو عينوت تهوم.
ثم قالت يسوما لام حقو ونشير 129 في النص إلى اليوم الثالث الذي تقسمت الأرض فيه
فعرفت أنها كانت موجودة ثم قالت يسوما لام حقو 130 فقولها حقو ترى به جعل
ه حك ينفي الاب ولا يخي 131 وقت يخرج عن ذلك 132 كما قال وماي لوا ياعبرو
في وهذا وضع في الأشياء 133 الكبار ووقت هيجان ماواجه ثم قالت بفحوه ممدي
ارس تشير إلى قولها عه لوا عامة ارص وحوصورت وروش عفوروت تينب على ما يقدم

112. فيسمن.
113. معينوت.
114. A, B, BL2, P.
116. إصمه.
118. إله.
120. إلوا.
121. بني،.
122. إصمه.
123. A, B, BL2, SP6.
124. إصمه.
125. إله.
126. أجهات.
127. إله.
128. مام.
129. إلوا.
130. إصمه.
132. إصمه.
133. A, B, BL2, SP6.
134. إله.
135. إله.
This is a typographical error, perhaps influenced by the Hebrew

The error is missing in A, BL2, P, SP6.

This is a typographical error, perhaps influenced by the Hebrew

The error is missing in A, BL2, P, SP6.
قولها وعنا بابين كأنها جعلت قابلة قولها أولادها كما يقبل الولد العاقل قول إيه الشفيق 48 الرحم وقالوا وابي درآخ أي يشعرو اذ كان يحفظهم سيبها 49 يفرون في الدارين جميعا وبعد أن قالت وعنا (K) بابين شعورا لن شرحتنا مرادها 150 منهم 151 فقلت لابوا أتاني وهى أداب التورية 152 كما شرحنا ذلك في قوله لأذاعت ححما ومواسره 153 وقالوا ويلنار تجتاح الى طائفة زادة وهي عضائلي لأنها قد قالت للجهالة وتبغنو خف عثمان 154 قالن للإلاود وما تهموا راي ومشورا عليكم ثم قالت ارثى آدام شويع لي وتمامه توري أنها ناداه أولا على رأس أفعال كل من أراد الحكمة فمضن باب دارها ولزم ابابها حتى أذا فتحن بابها دخل إليها ومعني في ذلك هو بعد أن ظهرت في عالمها 155 لزم الناس مواضيع الموحدين فقسم مواضعهم حتى يتمهم ولم تكلفهم أن يطرفوا 156 على الناس وبعثهم 160 ثم قالت كي مواسي ماضيا حيب ترد بن 161 الذي تعلم الحكمه وقد وصل إلى ثوب الآخر وقد وصى الله عنه فهو ينحم في سائر ما يعبدها في 162 امر 163 في هاذا الاسم مع رضا الله كل أفعال ومع سخطه كل أذان وقص وتهب 165 ثم قالت وحوطابا حوموس نفّذو تعني من عدل عن بابي مثل قوله Ал هساما وألا يحكي 166 وهو أحفظ الشعرة ولم يصبها ومعني حوموس نفّذو لأنه 168 قلها 169 بحيث أنه زال عن الحكمة التي الجهالة وقالت 170

148. الشفيق.
149. مركاب.
150. إبراهيم.
151. سفر.
152. أشتر.
153. إبراهيم.
154. مايسل.
155. باب.
156. إبراهيم.
157. سفر.
158. كهف.
159. إبراهيم.
160. سفر.
161. باب.
162. إبراهيم.
163. إبراهيم.
164. إبراهيم.
165. إبراهيم.
166. إبراهيم.
167. إبراهيم.
168. إبراهيم.
169. إبراهيم.
170. إبراهيم.
ON WISDOM, CREATION, AND ANGELS

Translation

(1) Does not wisdom call, and prudence make her voice public.
(2) On the highest places, which are erected upon the path, at the crossroads, [there] she stands.
(3) Across from the entrances, by the city gate, in the corridor of the entryways, [there] she acclaims.
(4) To you, O men, I call, my voice [addresses] humanity.
(5) O simple ones, discern cleverness, O fools, discern by means of your minds.
(6) Listen, for I discuss lofty matters, the opening of my lips speaks of upright things.
(7) For my palate utters truth, my lips abhor evil and injustice.
(8) All the words of my mouth are just; none is twisted and stubborn.
(9) They are all clear to the one who understands, [all] upright to those who find knowledge.
(10) Take my discipline and do not take silver, knowledge is better than gold.
(11) For wisdom is better than gemstones, and all that people desire does not compare with her.
(12) I, wisdom, dwell [in] cleverness, I found knowledge of inspiration.
(13) Fear of the Lord is hatred of the abominable; affluence and pride, the path of the wicked, and a mouth of changes I hate.
(14) I have design and religious law, I am prudence, I have might.
(15) By me kings reign and rulers decree what is just.
(16) By me leaders rule and the generous [are] all judges of justice.
(17) I love those who love me, and those who set out at dawn to seek me find me.
ON WISDOM, CREATION, AND ANGELS

(18) Wealth and honor are with me, great riches and justice.
(19) My fruit is better than gold and fine gold, my yield [is better] than choice silver.
(20) I will walk in the way of justice and in the midst of the paths of judgment.
(21) Endowing those who love me with something permanent and eternal, and filling their treasuries with precious things.
(22) The Lord owned me first among His creatures, before his deeds since then.
(23) From time immemorial I was invested with authority, since the beginning of things, before [there was] earth.
(24) When there were no depths I was born, before springs of heavy waters.
(25) Before the mountains had been established, before the hills, I was born.
(26) Before [He] created the earth, the alleys, and the first soil of the inhabited places.
(27) When He established the heavens I was there, when He drew the orbits upon the face of the great deep.
(28) When He supported the heights above with the force of the springs of the great deep.
(29) When He drew marks for the sea, so that water might not pass beyond its border, when He drew the foundations of the earth.
(30) I was with Him in the fortress, a source of delight day after day, rejoicing before Him at all times.
(31) Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and delighting in human beings.

In the introduction of the book he [the author] had already mentioned wisdom’s speech addressing the people of the world. He repeats it [here] with a detailed explanation. This is her [wisdom’s] description of herself in every shade and manner.

175. The word שְׁבָנִים שָׁם רֹאשִׁים “something permanent and eternal.” This is a foreshadowing of the commentary on this verse.
176. Notice that Yefet translates the Hebrew לדקדק “his path” into the Arabic فلا الأرض “his creatures.”
177. Yefet quotes this verse in his discussion of be-rešīt (in the beginning) in his commentary on Genesis 1:1. He asserts there that the terms qedem (before) and me-az (since then) have a similar meaning as be-rešīt, that is “before the world”, before the time in which these things were said. See Ben-Shammai et al., Manuscripts, p. 94, 150-151.
178. n-s-kh, niph'al, “to be consecrated be made leader.” Köehler and Baumgartner, Lexicon, vol. 1, p. 703.
179. Yefet interprets אֲרוֹן as if it were אֲרוֹרִים “fortress.”
180. YbE refers here to Prov 1:20-33.
181. This is a case of.repeat, see Wright, Grammar, vol. 2, §139 rem. b.
(2-3) He asserts that she calls from the highest places and in every thoroughfare. This is the call of the Lord’s prophets and scholars who discuss knowledge; for the world of the Lord does not lack scholars who discuss all together the unity of the Lord, the rational, and the revealed commandments.

(4) Her saying “To you, O men, I call [my voice (addresses) humanity]” etc. points to both nobility and common people.

(5) Her saying “O simple ones, discern cleverness, O fools, discern by means of your minds” points to the simple minded and the fools; for the clever already know her. People are divided into four groups, the clever, the simple minded, fools, and scoffers. The clever have already attained her. The scoffers do not want her; rather they mock those who master her. [Thus only] the simple minded and the fools are left. As for them, when they listen to the right words perhaps they will accept them and gain knowledge. For this reason she calls them and no others.

(6-7) Saying “Listen for I discuss lofty matters” she points to all higher knowledge. It is the pursuit by which a person achieves knowledge of the Lord. Saying “the opening of my lips speaks of upright things” she points to rational knowledge, and saying “For my palate utters truth” she points to revealed knowledge. By saying “my lips abhor evil and injustice” she removes from herself abominable and wicked words.

(8) She then says “All the words of my mouth are just,” pointing to the judgments, like the saying “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” (Ps 19:10). [This is also similar to what] he [Moses] said “And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances” (Deut 4:8). [S]he says, “none is twisted and stubborn.” This is similar to her saying, “my lips abhor evil and injustice” and like his [David’s] saying, “the instruction of the Lord is lucid, [making the eyes light up]” (Ps 19:9), he also says “The fear of the Lord is pure” (Ps 19:10).

(9) In saying, “They are all clear to the one who understands” she maintains that she [wisdom] is proven as truth to everyone who is knowledgeable among people. For such a person knows that she is the wisdom of the Wise One, almighty and exalted. Similarly, she is upright for the ones who have attained knowledge. Others do not understand her, and therefore see no value in her. [This is] similar to his [the prophet’s] saying “For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them” (Hos 14:10).

(10-11) After she describes the beauty of her words she urges people to accept her discipline and knowledge, saying, “Take my discipline.” This is similar to her saying “Her commerce is better than the commerce of silver” etc. (Prov 3:14), and “She [wisdom] is more cherished than precious stones”
etc. (Prov 3:15). She has already explained the meaning of [these passages] in the preceding section.

(12) She then returns to the description of her attributes, saying “I wisdom dwelled [in] cleverness.” Cleverness is the immersion of a person in matters in an appropriate manner in order that he will not rush blindly into [them] and cause his actions to be confused. The peti [fool] is antithetical to this. She says, “I dwelled [in] cleverness,” meaning, “I do things properly.” Her saying “I found knowledge of inspiration” means “I make the [process] of deliberation on a subject delightful, I attain the matter in an appropriate manner, so that I do not make mistakes.”

(13) She then says, “Fear of the Lord is hatred of the abominable” meaning “I guide people towards fear of the Lord and towards detesting evil and abominable actions.” After all, both reason and religious law require it. She

182. The Hebrew word חכמה has both a positive meaning and a negative meaning: "wisdom," and "cunning." In our verse it has a positive meaning, yet Yefet translates it by the Arabic خيت which only has a negative meaning “deceit, cunning.” In other occasions he uses the term خيت to connote a negative sense, see for example his commentary on 12:20:

حوشوش راع هم الدين يبدون على الناس البلا دأجأ حورش راع يحل عبث ومن خفيتهن انهم يكلمون بكلام اش[K]الوجوهين حتى لا يفق حاده على شرهم.

Those who plan evil are those who plan to actively harm people. [This term is] similar to the saying ‘creating evil... at all times’ (Prov 6:14). Due to their cunning they speak words of double meaning in order that people may not recognize their evil.” Hence Yefet attributes both a positive and a negative meaning to the Arabic خيت. This is an example of the expansion of a meaning of an Arabic word through the influence of a polysemic Hebrew word. Blau and Hopkins describe such a process in which a word in Arabic acquires a new meaning when using it for a translation of a polysemic Hebrew word. According to them this practice can already be traced in glossaries written in phonetic Judeo-Arabic, believed to be pre-Saadian. See J. BLAU and S. HOPKINS, “The Beginning of Judaico-Arabic Bible Exegesis According to an Old Glossary to the Book of Psalms” (Hebrew), in M. M. BAR-ASHER et al. (eds.), A Word Fiftieth Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegetics of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an presented to Hagai Ben-Shammai, Jerusalem, 2007, p. 235-284 (249-251). Sa’adiah clearly distinguishes between the two meanings of the word خيت, as pointed out by Yosef Qafi in his note on Saadiah’s translation of Proverbs 8:5: شريف ‘sḥrīf, סֵקְוּת mittešihat. See also S. SASSON, Methods, p. 153-156.

183. In the last two entries, יַעַבְד הַדַּבֵּר יַעֲשֵׂה פְתָח “I wisdom dwell [in] cleverness,” and יַעַבְד פְתָח יֵשַׂבְּעַה “knowledge of inspiration.” Yefet presents his ideas with regard to education and the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. It is all meant to be done in an orderly manner, without rushing and confusion. This way will lead a person to arrive at things properly and without mistakes.
then says, “affluence and pride.” This is a repetition of one concept. However, it pertains to two aspects. One is the demonstration of a person to his Creator that he is His servant and in need of His management. The other is one’s power and superiority over people. With regard to “the path of the wicked,” she points to evil doctrines and the path of the wicked that lead to cunning people in order to harm them. As for her saying “and a mouth of changes,” she means that he [an evil person] says things contrary to what they are. He directs people’s intention to whatever he wants, and he turns matters upside down. This is so also in matters of faith. Therefore, she asserts that she detests the following four: “affluence, pride, the path of the wicked, and a mouth of changes.”

(14) In saying, “I have design and religious law [I am prudence, I have might]” she mentions three things by which she assists kings. Each one [of them is used] according to their circumstances. (a) Good management, like his [Solomon’s] saying “but with many advisers” (Prov 15:22). (b) She mentions tušiya, which is [attaining] fine knowledge, and striving to know matters thoroughly [lit: through their end]. (c) Might together with management constitute perfection. Might alone is of no avail, but when joined with wisdom it is complete and perfect.

(15-16) When she groups these attributes together she says, “By me kings reign and rulers decree what is just. By me leaders rule and the generous [are] all judges of justice.” She thus mentions kings, nobles, judges and people of high stature. She shows that by means of her [wisdom] they arrive at that [their stature]. This is especially so with regard to the kings of the sons of Israel and their appointees, whose kingship and nobility last forever. She says, “decree what is just” meaning “all judges of justice,” for they teach the Torah of the Lord, which is just and honest.

(17) She then says, “I love those who love me,” pointing to enduring adherence to knowledge. Her love for people is what she mentions later, meaning that she would usher them [those who love her] to high statures in this world and in the world to come.

(18) She mentions this world by saying “Wealth and honor are with me.” Wealth is estates and land; riches are precious stones and dirhams and dinars; and honor is dominion, as he had already said earlier “from her left [hand] wealth and honor” (Prov 3:16). Her saying u-šedaqa [justice] points to the reward in the world to come, similarly to his [Moses’s] saying u-šedaqa tihye lanu, “It will be therefore to our merit” (Deut 6:25).

(19) She then says, “My fruit is better than gold and fine gold.” Solomon, peace be upon him, had already described her in like fashion and we have already explained it above.
(20) She then says, “I will walk in the way of justice” etc., meaning that her people, unlike the ignorant, are not familiar with the path of the wicked; but rather they know ṣedāqa u-mišpat like Abraham, peace be upon him.

(21) She then says, “Endowing those who love me with something permanent and eternal” pointing to eternal reward, as the term yeš indicates something that lasts forever. While the affairs of this world are transient, the world to come is eternal, like the saying “some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2). Thus she combines the world to come with this world by saying “Wealth and honor are with me, and great riches and justice.” This is what she means in this verse (v. 21).

By saying “Wealth and honor are with me, (and great riches and justice)” she asserts that these four attributes are within her, but she does not mention [in that verse (v. 18)] upon whom she bestows them. She therefore, explains [in this verse (v. 21)] that she will bestow them upon those who love her.

(22) She then says, “The Lord owned me first among his creatures [darko],” meaning before His [other] creatures. A similar [usage is found in the following verses] “He is the first of God’s works [darkhe El]” (Job 40:19); “These are indeed but the outskirts of his ways [derakhaw]” (Job 26:14); “all His ways [derakhaw] are just” (Deut 32:4); “This God—his way [darko] is perfect” (Ps 18:31). The intent in all of these is “the created ones.” When she says qanani she does not mean that He brought her into existence in the same fashion as qone šamayim wa-areš (Creator of heaven and earth) (Gen 14:19, 22), for wisdom was always known to the Lord. Rather she means by it: “I existed when there was no world.” And her saying “before his deeds” is an inclusive expression, which he [the author] will explain in detail later. It also seems that she hints by that at things that were created in the beginning [be-rešīt], which are heaven, earth, water, darkness,

184. Yefet regards the word הַּדָּרוֹק (way) contextually to mean “creatures/creation.” Such a meaning is evident with regard to the first citation (Job 40:19) as it refers to Behemoth, which is presented in the book of Job as one of God’s first creations. Similarly, the second citation (Job 26:14) is found in a context of Creation. In the third citation (Deut 32:4), the poem of Haazinu, the clause ויֵאמָר שָאֹרָהָ בְּכָל הָיָּשָׁר “for all his ways are just” stands in parallel to והּרָאָהָ בְּכָל הָיָּשָׁר “The Rock, His work is perfect.” Thus each one of these citations points to God’s work/creation. In the fourth citation (Ps 18:31), the poetic parallel connects the word הַדָּרוֹק “His way” with God’s word הָדָּרוֹק. By presenting this citation, Yefet points to creation that takes place through the word of God.

185. Yefet translates this verse as malakan, meaning “owns me.” See discussion above, p. 54-56.
ON WISDOM, CREATION, AND ANGELS

and wind. Because of that she says “since then,” for she preceded the universe.

(23) She then says, “From time immemorial I was invested with authority, since the beginning of things,” meaning when the Lord created the angels. She then informed the Lord about the wisdom that is within her, and she was undoubtedly appointed to govern them [the angels]. Her saying “before [there was] earth” points to the two earlier days [of creation], before the third day, in which the earth was uncovered.

(24) She then says, “When there were no depths I was born, [before springs of heavy waters].” She first mentions the earth (v. 23), and then she mentions the great deep and the springs (v. 24). She points to the streams, which spring through the oceans and out of the belly of the earth. She asserts that she had existed before any of that [came into existence].

(25-26) She then says “Before the mountains... I was born” [and] “Before [He] created the earth, the alleys” pointing to the places which were dry. It seems as though she divides the earth into two parts, one constitutes tehomot [great depths] and ma’yanot [springs], while another constitutes dry [land]. Furthermore, dry land is divided into four parts. The first constitutes mountains and hills, which act [for the universe] as supporting pillars [do] for buildings. The second is the desert, unfit for human dwellings; she names this part eres [land]. The third are roads in which people travel, these she names hušot.186 The fourth are cities and land in which people dwell, these she names roš ‘aphrot tebhel [the first soil of the inhabited places]. She asserts that before the earth took this shape wisdom had already existed.

(27) She then says, “When He established the heavens I was there,” pointing to the heavens that were created at the same time as the earth. It is as if she first says that she had existed before the universe, and then she says that she also exists through the existence of the universe. Her saying “when He drew the orbits upon the face of the great deep” points to the second phase after her [the earth’s] creation. For the phase of her [the earth’s] creation differs from the phase of her rotation.187 She said “upon the face of the great deep” because the seat of the celestial sphere [was] on the surface of the water. This was so because the land was immersed in water, none of it laid bare.

(28) She then says, “When He supported the heights,” pointing to the raqia’ [firmament], which He created on the second day. By saying “He supported” she means fixing it [the firmament] in the middle between the

187. See discussion on p. 59-60.
higher heavens and the earth, so that it does not incline towards any of the six directions. She asserts that she had existed also at that time. By saying “with the force of the springs of the great deep” she means that the water was still firm upon the earth when it was divided: some of it was placed above the raquia’ and some above the earth. The [water] that was above the earth was very thick and that is why she says “with the force of the springs of the great deep.”

(29) She then says, “When He drew marks for the sea,” pointing to the third day [of creation] in which the earth was divided. She asserts that she had existed [then] too. She says, “When He drew huqqo [marks] for the sea,” meaning by the word huqqo that the Lord assigned a border [for the ocean] by which it ends and beyond which it never expands, as it says “so that water might not pass beyond its border.” This is its [the ocean’s] nature during mighty winters, the seasons of stormy waves. Her saying “when He drew the foundations of the earth” points to her saying “Before [He] created the earth, the alleys, and the first soil of the inhabited places,” in light of the commentary in situ. The meaning is that the earth was fixed in the place that the Lord had assigned for it, as the saying “He established the earth on its foundations” etc. (Ps 104:5).

(30) She then says, “I was with Him in the fortress” pointing to what remains of the days of creation. These are the three [last] days in which He created the stars on the fourth, the sea animals on the fifth, and the land animals on the sixth day [of creation].

Her saying “a source of delight day after day” points to the immaculate works of the Lord, which can be observed [by the senses], and which serve as evidence that the One who had made them is wise. This is like his [David’s] saying, “O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all” (Ps 104:24). All that was intended for human beings in many ways, and wisdom delighted in [all] that for she would say: “all this is for me and on my account.”

She then says “Rejoicing in His inhabited land” etc. This is a description of her action after the Lord had created Adam, upon whom He bestowed wisdom and with whom He invested all the sciences. She mentions both civilization and humanity because [civilization] is where people dwell. And they [people] come after the angels with regard to knowing wisdom. They discuss her [wisdom], they exalt her potentiality, they delight in her, and they benefit from her in both worlds. This has been so since the Lord created

188. It is surprising to see that Yefet does not relate to his translation of this verse at all. In his translation he understands הַרְוָא as “palace” (ḥusān), probably because of the similarity with the Hebrew word armon, “palace.”
Adam and as long as the world exists. For the Lord had created the angels along with the first creatures [and He entrusted] them with wisdom. However, when He created Adam wisdom began to be [both] with the angels and Adam. Since the Lord created Adam she is always with him [Adam], as the world of the Lord does not lack people of knowledge and monotheism [tawhid]. It works according to that which wisdom requires, as the world was created for her, and it is by her that the world is established.

(32) Now, sons, accept\(^{189}\) my words, and happy is the one who keeps my ways.

(33) Accept discipline and become wise, and do not tear down.

(34) Happy is the person who accepts my words, holding on to my door posts day after day, in order to guard my gateway.

(35) For the one who finds me finds life and obtains approbation from the Lord.

(36) The one who errs with regard to me hurts himself, all who hate me love death.

(32) By her saying “Now, sons” it is as if she regards [lit: makes, places] those who accept her words as her offspring, comparing them to a bright child who accepts the words of his compassionate and merciful father. She says, “happy is the one who keeps my ways” for by adhering to her paths they earn merit in both worlds.

(33) After she says, “Now, sons, accept my words” she explains her request from them saying, “accept my ethical teachings for these are the ethical teachings of the Torah.” This is similar to our explanation concerning his [Solomon’s] saying “[Given] in order that people will learn from them wisdom and discipline” (Prov 1:2). Her saying “do not tear down” requires the insertion of an additional word, “my advice,” in light of her earlier saying to the ignorant “you have torn down all my advice” (Prov 1:25). Her intention is to say to her children “do not tear my idea and my counsel from yourselves.”

(34) Then she says, “Happy is the person who accepts my words [holding on to my door posts day after day, in order to guard my gateway]” indicating that she first called the leaders of the people, as she had mentioned. She asserts that she later adhered to her dwelling place, her house, in order that anyone who seeks wisdom should aim for the door of her house and adhere to her gates, so that when she opens her door he should enter. The meaning here is that after she appeared in His world people began to adhere to the

\(^{189}\) Notice the nonliteral אֶכְפָּר (accept) for the Hebrew משמע (listen). See also the next verse.
doctrines of the monotheists. They flocked to their [the monotheists’] places in order that they learn from them, even though she [wisdom] did not oblige them [the monotheists] to be around people or teach them.

(35) She then says, “For the one who finds me finds life,” meaning that by acquiring wisdom one secures the reward of the world to come,190 for he finds favor in the Lord. He therefore will succeed in all that he toils with in his world. With the Lord’s favor comes utmost acceptance, whereas with His anger come all misfortune, misery, and ruin.

(36) She then says, “The one who errs [kh-t’] with regard to me hurts himself” referring to “the one who strays from my door.” This is similar to the saying “sling a stone at a hair and not miss [kh-t’]” (Judg 20:16). The meaning is missing [the target] by a strand of hair, and he misses it.191 The meaning of “hurts himself” is that he kills himself, for he gives up wisdom in favor of ignorance. She says “love death,” meaning the recompense in the world to come. She says “love” for they [the transgressors] love defiance and incline towards it; therefore, they merit death.

**Manuscripts**

*Berlin Or Qu 282 (B)*

This manuscript belongs to the State Library in Berlin. Paper; square Hebrew script; 423 folios; includes Yefet’s commentary on sections of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Kings, the Minor Prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, and Daniel. The commentary on Proverbs is found in three separate segments, written by different scribes in different periods. The first segment is made up of 101 folios and contains Yefet’s introduction and commentary on the first sixteen chapters of Proverbs. Page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso; square Hebrew script; the first word of the running biblical text is written in rabbinic characters; 22 lines per page; no vocalization. Some of the text is out of order, and it seems to be the product of several scribes. Between folios 41-87 the text is damaged and even effaced such that it is not legible. The second segment contains 58 folios. It begins with Yefet’s commentary on Proverbs 26:1 and ends with the commentary on Proverbs 31:31. Page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso; square Hebrew

190. Notice the midrašic notion that life, or long life, is really life in the world to come.

191. Yefet distinguishes between the two meaning of the root kh-t’. He says that the meaning of this root in this verse is “to miss,” “to err,” and not “to transgress.”
script; the first word of the running biblical text is written in rabbinic character; 23 lines per page; no vocalization. The third segment is a collection of 17 loose folios that include an assortment of out-of-order fragments of Yefet’s commentary on Proverbs between chapter 6 and chapter 25. Page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso; square Hebrew script; the running biblical text is written in rabbinic characters; Tiberian vocalization of the Hebrew text; 14 lines per page. A brief description of this manuscript is found in Steinschneider’s catalogue of Berlin manuscripts.192

**MS London British Library Or 2553 (BL1)**

This manuscript belongs to the British Library. Manuscript No. 294 in G. Margoliouth catalogue;193 paper; 132 leaves; approximately 21.9 × 17.5 cm; 13-15 lines per page; some of the leaves are badly damaged; elegant *naskhi* handwriting of the eleventh century.194 The biblical text, the Arabic translation, and the commentary are written in Arabic script. This manuscript has no colophon as both ends are missing. Yet, it is the earliest known copy of Yefet’s work on Proverbs, as it was produced within a century of the original. Since the early Arabic-script manuscripts of Yefet’s work are considered the most accurate and closest to the original, this manuscript was used as the primary text for the current edition wherever possible. In order to accurately reflect this manuscript, it is represented in the edition in Arabic script.

**MS London British Library Or 2506 (BL2)**

This manuscript belongs to the British Library. Manuscript No. 293 in G. Margoliouth catalogue;195 two uniform volumes; paper; consisting respectively of 129 and 175 leaves; approximately 17.8 × 13.7 cm; 14 lines

194. For the history of the purchase of this manuscript see R. HOERNING, *British Museum Karaite MSS. Descriptions and Collation of Six Karaite Manuscripts of Portions of the Hebrew Bible in Arabic Characters*, London, 1889, p. v, viii.
per page; page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso; square Hebrew script; the running biblical text is written in rabbinic characters of the fifteenth century, and vocalized according to the Tiberian vowel signs. In comparison, the writing of the translation and commentary is more cursive and the characters are smaller. The end of each verse, each translation and each entry is marked by a colon. This manuscript is the second major source for the present edition. It is the second oldest manuscript, which contains almost the entire text, and seems in a good condition.

Paris Heb 292 (P)

This manuscript belongs to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Paper; 233 folios; 21 lines per page; Hebrew script; square and rabbinic characters; each verse of the running biblical text is written in large square characters; no vocalization; page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso. This manuscript contains almost the entire text of Yefet’s translation and commentary on Proverbs ending in the middle of the commentary on chapter 31. It is dated to the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries according to the IMHM online catalogue. The text is sloppy and often inaccurate.196

MS Adler 3356 (A)

This manuscript belongs to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. It is also known as Adler 102 and Adler 103 and found in the Adler Catalogue on p. 15.197 Two uniform volumes; paper; consisting respectively of 142 and 128 leaves; the first volume is approximately 20.2 × 16.2 × 3.6 cm; page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso; square Hebrew script; the running biblical text is written in rabbinic characters and vocalized by Tiberian vowel signs. However, vocalization often deviates from the Tiberian Masorah.


197. This manuscript is the property of the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. In addition to the identification of Adler 3356 as ENA 102, a handwritten conversion catalogue of the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary erroneously lists it as ENA 219. This mistake has entered the inventory of Yefet’s extant manuscripts of Bible translations and commentaries compiled by Giuliano Tamani. See G. TAMANI, “La tradizione delle opere di Yefet b. Ali”, Bulletin d'études karaites 1 (1983), p. 27-76 (68). This error is also found in Wechsler’s identification of these manuscripts. See Wechsler, “Proverbs 31:1-9”, p. 395; idem, “Proverbs 31:10-31”, p. 286.
This manuscript contains the entire text of Yefet’s translation and commentary on Proverbs. Ben-Shammai writes in his dissertation that the scribe is most probably Yosef b. Raṣon b. Shmuel of the house of al-Baraka (early seventeenth century).\(^{198}\)

According to the IMHM online catalogue the first volume is dated to the seventeenth century and the handwriting is classified as Yemenite (Aden). In the same catalogue, the second volume is dated to the nineteenth century and the handwriting is classified as Persian. This seems to be an error, since the two volumes look uniform with regard to the handwriting. Perhaps the dating of the second volume was based on the last pages, which were filled in by a scribe in the nineteenth century.

**SP RNL EVR ARAB I 241 (SP6)**

This manuscript belongs to the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg. Second Firkovitch collection; some of the folios are out of order; 207 folios; 19 lines per page; no colophon; Hebrew script; square and rabbinic characters; each verse of the running text is written in large square characters; Tiberian vocalization of the running biblical text; page guards at the bottom left corner of each verso. The text begins in the middle of the commentary on chapter 6. This manuscript includes counting of the \(p\)arašiyot\(\)pisqa’\(\)ot using the Hebrew alphabet. The readings of the \(q\)ere are noted in the margins. The division into portions, sedarim, is marked by the letter samekh on the margins.

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