
Aspectos del mundo material de la Biblia en el judeoárabe medieval: La Flora y la Fauna en el glosario Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ al-Ṣaʿba fī al-Miqra a Isaías de Abū al-Faraŷ Hārūn

Nasir Basal
nbasal@tauex.tau.ac.il
Tel Aviv University
ORCID: 0000-0001-9515-1909

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Abstract
This article examines how Abū al-Faraj Hārūn identified, translated, and interpreted the ancient biblical terms in the book of Isaiah in Arabic to learn about the material world of the Bible, as it was then perceived in the medieval Arab world and Persia. The article focuses on the topics of flora and fauna, providing a comparative analysis of Abū al-Faraj Hārūn’s definitions in the Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ with the writings of other Karaite scholars from his circle and those of prior, contemporary, or later rabbinic exegetes. The study of these terms in scholars’ writings reveals that many of them were not understood in the same way by medieval exegetes; each interpreted the different terms and translated them into Arabic according to their understanding and the accepted interpretation in their times and places. Therefore, it is little wonder that conflicting opinions arose among different biblical commentators in different eras and different regions. Yet, it also occasionally happened that a biblical word was left untouched, without being translated into Arabic.

Resumen
Este artículo examina cómo Abū al-Faraŷ Hārūn identificó, tradujo e interpretó en árabe los antiguos términos bíblicos del libro de Isaías para conocer el mundo material de la Biblia, tal como se percibía entonces en el mundo árabe medieval y en Persia. El artículo se centra en los temas de la flora y la fauna, proporcionando un análisis comparativo de las definiciones de Abū al-Faraŷ Hārūn en el Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ con los escritos de otros estudiosos caraitas de su círculo y los de exégetas rabínicos anteriores, contemporáneos o posteriores. El estudio de estos términos en dichos escritos revela que muchos de ellos no fueron entendidos de la misma manera por los exégetas medievales; cada uno interpretó los diferentes términos y los tradujo al árabe de acuerdo con su comprensión y la interpretación aceptada en su tiempo y lugar. Por lo tanto, no es de extrañar que surgieran opiniones contradictorias entre los diferentes comentaristas bíblicos en diferentes épocas y regiones. También ocurrió que una palabra bíblica se dejó como está, sin ser traducida al árabe.
1. Introduction

1.1 Šarḥ/Tafsīr al-ʿAlfāẓ al-Ṣaʿba fī al-Miqra (= Explanation of the Difficult Words in the Hebrew Bible) is a bilingual, Hebrew-Arabic glossary of Biblical Hebrew. It is apparently the last book composed by the influential Karaite scholar Abū al-Faraj Hārūn, who lived and was active in Jerusalem in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and who wrote on various subjects, including all aspects of Hebrew grammar.

The treatise’s existence was first mentioned by A. E. Harkavy, who described it as a work containing explanations of difficult words in the Hebrew Bible but, as noted

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1 Henceforth Šarḥ, Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ. The composition’s title is not written uniformly in the manuscripts. A. E. Harkavy (1881:158. See note 5 below) mentions it under the name شرح الألفاظ (= explanation of the words). It would seem that he saw a short version of the book’s title, perhaps even in Arabic script, but did not mention in which manuscript he saw it. The title appears in different forms in various manuscripts, for example: Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ allatī fīha Ṣuʿūba fī al-Miqra wa-Ḍikr ʾIṣtiqāqihā (= Explanation of the Difficult Words in the Bible and Mention of Their Derivation), Tafsīr al-ʿAlfāẓ al-Ṣaʿba (= Explanation of the Difficult Words), Tafsīr ʿAlfāẓ al-Miqra (= Explanation of the Words of the Bible), etc. For more on the names of this work and references in the manuscripts, see, for example, Basal, 2018b: 323-324.

2 As the author himself states explicitly at the end of the book, he exceeded the request made by the person who had ordered the book and included also some matters of semantics and grammar which he had not mentioned in previous writings. He did not defer the discussion on these issues to a more appropriate subsequent composition because he feared he would die in the meantime or that other troubles would prevent him from completing the project (Goldstein, 2014: 373: 11-12 and the English translation, ibid.: 365).

3 Abū al-Faraj and his writings are discussed in numerous recent studies. For a partial survey, see Basal, 2018b: 321-322, n. 3.

4 He is the author of the following works: al-Kitāb al-Muṣṭamil ʿalā al-ʿUṣūl wa-al-Fuṣūl fī al-Luġa al-ʿIbrāniyya (= The Comprehensive Book on the Foundations and Branches of the Hebrew Language), henceforth: al-Muṣṭamil, Muṣṭamil; al-Kitāb al-Ḵāfī fī al-Luġa al-ʿIbrāniyya (= The Sufficient Book on the Hebrew Language), henceforth: al-Ḵāfī, Kāfī [on its luxurious scientific edition see Khan et al., 2003; Basal, 2006]; al-Madhāl ilā Ilm al-Diqḍiq fī Ṭurāq al-Luğa al-ʿIbrāniyya (= Introduction to the Science of Grammar on the Ways of the Hebrew Language); the Masora treatise Ḥiḍḍiyat al-ʿQārī (= Guidance of the Reader); the biblical commentaries Taṣārīf (= “Digest” of Ibn Nūḥ’s commentary on the Pentateuch) and Ṣarḥ/Tafsīr al-ʿAlfāẓ al-Ṣaʿba fī al-Miqra (= Explanation of the Difficult Words in the Bible), which is the subject of the present paper. Previously two other works were also ascribed to Abū al-Faraj: Muṭṭasal al-Ḵāfī (= Abridgment of al-Ḵāfī [= The Sufficient]) and Kitāb al-Uṣūd fī Ṭaṣārīf al-Luğā al-ʿIbrāniyya (= The Book of the rules on Inflation in the Hebrew Language). However, following Meir Zislin’s and Nadia Vidro’s research (Vidro, 2011: 7-10, § 2.2), scholarly opinion today tends to hold that the latter works were composed by another Karaite sage, who lived in the second half of the eleventh century and whose identity is unknown. For a recent discussion of these works see, for example, Basal, 2018b: 322, n. 4.

5 Harkavy, 1881: 158. See also Olszowy-Schlanger, 2001: 181.
above, did not provide the manuscript’s number. A few years later, Samuel Poznanski\(^6\) identified British Museum MS BL Or. 2499 (pp. 1-21) as a part of the treatise mentioned by Harkavy, a proposal which G. Margoliouth accepted in his catalogue of Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts in the British Museum Library\(^7\). Poznanski repeated this identification in another article in which he published passages from the British Museum manuscript\(^8\). However, in our opinion, this manuscript text does not belong to Šahr al-‘Alfāz and certainly does not constitute another version of it\(^9\).

Numerous manuscripts of the work in question have been preserved in various libraries throughout the world. The number of extant copies testifies to its popularity\(^10\). Almost all the manuscripts are written in Judeo-Arabic, in Hebrew script. Three are written in Arabic script\(^11\).

1.2 Biblical glossaries and word lists are a genre that existed already before R. Saadia Gaon’s (882-942) translation of the Pentateuch. The first modern scholar who mentioned the existence of bilingual Hebrew-Arabic glossaries and word lists in medieval Judeo-Arabic literature was S.D. Goitein\(^12\). Several subsequent articles also discussed this genre, occasionally accompanied by original texts\(^13\).

Abū al-Faraj composed the glossary Šahr al-‘Alfāz al-Ṣaʿba fī al-Miqra, at the end of which\(^14\) he explicitly states that he did so at the request of Abū al-Ṭayyib Šmu’el bin Manṣūr\(^15\), for the latter’s two sons. In the treatise, Abū al-Faraj continued in his predecessors’ footsteps and compiled a glossary of the entire Hebrew Bible, including the Aramaic parts\(^16\). To the best of our knowledge, Šahr al-‘Alfāz is the only known glossary that encompassed all twenty-four books of the Old Testament\(^17\).

Šahr al-‘Alfāz follows the order of the books of the Bible. It was composed after Abū al-Faraj had completed his two grammatical treatises, al-Muštamil and al-Kāfī, since he explicitly notes that in the former he discussed some matters that are mentioned

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7 Margoliouth, 1899, I: 205-206, no. 276; see also Olszowy-Schlanger, 2001: 181.
8 Poznanski, 1908; see also Olszowy-Schlanger, 2001:181.
9 I intend to devote a paper to this manuscript in the near future.
10 Abū al-Faraj’s Kitāb al-Kāfī enjoyed similar popularity: there are at least sixty extant manuscript copies of it (see Khan et al., 2003, II: 1056-1057).
11 So far three manuscripts containing passages of Šahr al-‘Alfāz in Arabic script have been found, all in the National Library of Russia. The largest consists of eight pages from the end of Jeremiah and the beginning of Ezekiel. I am currently preparing this manuscript for publication.
14 The ending has been preserved in its entirety in two MSS. Goldstein (2014: 361-374) published it with an English translation and commentary.
15 The identity of Abū al-Ṭayyib is unclear.
16 On this and other features of the glossaries, see, for example, Eldar, 2001: 23-29. This issue will be discussed at length in the Introduction of my book (Basal, 2020: § 2.2.6).
17 This is the work to which Téné (1994) refers.
in the two latter works, and occasionally also states that he added to what was contained in them.  

The usual structure of the entries in the manuscripts consists of three elements, sometimes in a row and sometimes arranged in a column: (a) the entry itself, usually a single word, but occasionally consisting of two or more words; (b) an Arabic translation; (3) a fragment, of variable length, of a verse in which the word appears. However, in the case of *hapax legomena*, Abū al-Faraj provides only an Arabic translation, adding *min al-mawḍī* (= from the context), *min al-ma'nā* (= from the meaning [in the context]), *min al-qarīna* (= from the context), or *min al-mujāwara* (= from the adjacent [text]).

At the end of the book, Abū al-Faraj notes that he discussed two types of words: (a) difficult words in the Bible (*al-'alfāẓ al-ṣa'bā fī al-Miqra*); and (b) words which present a certain amount of difficulty (*ma'mā yakūn min al-'alfāẓ qadr min al-ṣu'ūba*), “whose meanings are not common in the Bible, and whose intentions are not clear, as they are in clear and common words such as *ʾereṣ* (אֶרֶץ = earth, *šamayim* (שָׁמַיִם = heaven, and others)

In many entries, Abū al-Faraj also added grammatical or exegetical explanations to the Arabic translation. These explanations are sometimes quite long, or even very long, relative to the glossary as a whole.

1.3 The book of Isaiah is filled with numerous words and expressions denoting objects in the material world, including fauna, flora, celestial objects, metals, and other minerals, gemstones, jewelry, ornaments, fabrics, foods, vessels, measures, weights, and more.  

These biblical *realia* terms are very ancient, reflecting the material world of the biblical period. Many of them were not understood identically by medieval exegetes; each of them interpreted the various terms and translated them into Arabic according to their understanding and the accepted interpretation in their own times and places. Therefore, it is little wonder that conflicting opinions arose among different biblical commentators in different times and different regions. It also happened that a biblical word was left as it is, without being translated into Arabic.

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18 See, for example, Abū al-Faraj’s discussion of the preposition “ל” in *דַּבְדַּבְדַּב יְמֵי המַעֲשָׂר* (Daniel 11:1), National Library of Russia MS NLR Evr.-Arab. I. 1391 (87b: 4–6), where he explicitly states that the discussion in *Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ* does not also appear in his *al-Muṣṭamil* and *al-Kāfī*: יד נמי החלומים פא הלאה墣 ממקסימור פן חארא żeby לאמהלמוד ויר אין לדא יסדו פי פָּלְקָר פָּדְרָה (The types of the *lamed* have already been discussed completely in the [or: my] two books *al-Kāfī* and *al-Muṣṭamil*, without what I mentioned here, as far as I know, which is why I wrote it [here]).

19 This will be discussed at length in the Introduction of my book (Basal, 2020: § 2.2.6), accompanied by examples from all parts of *Šarḥ al-ʿAlfāẓ*.

20 For the Arabic version, see Goldstein (2014: 373) and for the English translation *ibid.* 364. A characterization of the words included in the treatise would require a comprehensive study of all the entries. At present the picture is not sufficiently clear; the issue will be treated at length in my book (Basal, 2020: § 3).

21 For example, his grammatical discussion of the form מָשָׁא (Jeremiah 9:17) MS L1: 169b:3-170a, or his extended explanation of מַשָׁא (Jeremiah 23:33) MS L1: 182b:1-184b:17.
Abū al-Faraj, too, translated into Arabic and explained material terms in his šarḥ, using the Arabic terminology of his times. It is also possible that he relied on relevant contemporary Arabic literature.

An examination of Abū al-Faraj’s translations and definitions in the Šarḥ, when compared with the writings of other Karaite scholars from his circle as well as contemporary, preceding or subsequent rabbinic exegetes, can teach us about the material world of the Bible, as perceived in the medieval Arab world and Persia.

In sections that follow, I will present the biblical flora and fauna terminology mentioned in the šarḥ on Isaiah and Hārūn’s translations/explanations, which I will attempt to explain and compare to those of contemporary and previous Karaite and rabbinic commentators. The following are all the relevant terms I found in Šarḥ al-ʾAlfāẓ on Isaiah, accompanied by brief explanations22.

2. Fauna and flora in Šarḥ al-ʾAlfāẓ on Isaiah

2.1 Fauna

2.1.1 Birds

1. דַיָׁה – דַיוֹת (Isa. 34:15):
   אֲלַדִיוֹת [...] הוּא כָּהֵם דַיָּה אלֵדַיָּהוּ דַיוֹת וּדַיוֹת הוּא גְּמֻה דַיָּה אלֵדַיָּהוּ (Deut. 14:13: יַדְיָהוּ), which is mentioned as one of the twenty-one unclean fowl.

Abū al-Faraj quotes the Hebrew word as is, without any identification, beyond the comment that this bird belongs to a list that consists, so he says, of twenty-one unclean species of fowl23. However, Jefet, Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 72), and Avishur (2000) ad loc.; Ibn Janāḥ translated it in ῲṣûl as חָדָה, a large dark-brown bird of prey of the hawk family24.

2. סוּס – כ סוּס (Isa. 38:14):
   סְעֹסֵנִיַּת (sunūniyya) = like a swallow, like Jefet and Saadia ad loc. (Ratzabi, 1993: 81), and Alfāsī as well25. Ibn Balʿam ad loc. (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992: 172).

22 For the reader’s benefit, I added some distinguishing markers that do not appear in the original Arabic text.
23 A list of unclean birds appears in two places in the Pentateuch: Lev. 11 and Deut. 14. Each list contains twenty names of birds. This is also the number given in the Talmud (Tractate Ḥullin 63a), but, according to another opinion there, the number of unclean birds is twenty-four. See Dotan – Basal, 2011, II: 621-622, n. 4.
26 Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875: 477:9-11) identified as קרקל and שֹׁרָסִים (Bacher, 1896-1897: 335): מַרְבָּא. This is also Targum Yonatan’s translation, like the translation of the word סס in the Talmud, Tractate Qiddushin 44a: כְּסָס. Avishur (2000: 84) ad loc.: כְּסָס. See also Dotan – Basal, 2011, I: 413; II: 797-798.
3. **עָׁגוּר** (Isa. 38:14) – כרכי (karkī) = cran, like Jefet,27 Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 81), Ibn Bal am (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992: 172), and Avishur (2000: 84) ad loc. Alfāsī28: אבר המדרז יקאל له אלבלירג (= and bats) which is called קְרֵיקָה. Ibn Janah: כרכי (= It has been translated as סונונית [= swallow]; it is [what is called] שֵׁשִׁי). Ben Mobarak translates likewise29.

Abū al-Faraj interpreted כרכי in the same way as Jefet ad loc.; the latter left the original Hebrew word in the translation and noted in the commentary on the verse: והו אבר המדרז (It is called שֵׁשִׁי). Saadia (Derenbourg, 1893: 275) translated ו הָׁרָּאָה (Deut. 14:13). Targum Yonatan ad loc.: לעוף (= bird, birds) ad loc., as did Alfāsī and Avishur (2000: 62) for ל עֵיט (Isa. 18:16) in the case under discussion here and in the reference verse.

32 See Jefet (Isaiah, II, 14a:8); Ben Mobarak (2010, II: 52:5): אבר המדרז (= a bird of prey). This is how Saadia (Derenbourg, 1893: 275) translated ו הָׁרָּאָה (Deut. 14:13). Targum Yonatan ad loc.: לעוף (= bird, birds) ad loc., as did Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 389:19) and Avishur (2000: 62) for ל עֵיט (Isa. 18:16) in the case under discussion here and in the reference verse.

dictionaries means either a domestic or a wild donkey, and is synonymous with حمار (himār)36.

2. (Isa. 53:7) – רָחֵל (rabla) = the wild [animal] (ldh). Hebrew לוכד (ḥimār), with the sound correspondence Hebrew ḫ (ḥ) – Arabic خ (x). Abū al-Faraj thus makes a covert comparison with Arabic: ماقسم لله ولا يألعه ولا مفألا ٍ (similar to رخَل, a female lamb).

Jefet, Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 119), and Avishur (2000: 100) ad loc. also translated רָחֵל, while Ibn Janāḥ writes רָחֵל (ewes)39.

2.1.3 Wild beasts

1. אִיִים (Isa. 13:22) – אלגִזאיריין יעני וחוש אלגִזאיר = (the dwellers of the islands, that is, the wild beasts [who dwell] on the islands). Abū al-Faraj interpreted the unusual plural form אִיִים in the same way as Jefet, Alfāsī, and Avishur (2000: 58) ad loc. Others understood it differently40.

2. נָׁחָׁש בָׁרִיחַ (Isa. 27:1) – אלחנש אלמעארץ (לْمُع ارِضٱأ لْح ن ش) = the bolt snake, that is, a snake who serves as a bolt or latch, from מִן‌...הַקָׁצֶהלִב רוֹחִַ (to bolt [... from one end) (Exod. 36:33). All translators used various forms derived from the Arabic verb עַרְצָה (עד, عَزَز) = to bolt41, except Jefet ad loc.: חנש פשתבאן (חנש פְּשַׁת בָּא = bolt snake42.

3. נָׁחָׁש עֲקַלָׁתוֹן (Isa. 27:1) – אלחנש אלשכס (ٱأ لْح ن ش, لشَّكِسٱلشَّكْس) = the winding snake. Similarly, Abū al-Faraj translated the word עֲקַל קַלוֹת (Jud. 5:6) in the reference verse: שכסאת (شكْس ات, ش كِس ات) = winding. A similar

36 See, for example, Lane, 1863-1893, V: 2208; Dozy, 1881, II: 194.
40 Jefet ad loc. translated (Isaiah, I, 144a:3): חתולין (= beasts of the islands), and explained (ibid.: 11-12): זזריה אלוחוש אלג, and Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875) as well (607:9). Others understood the form אִיִים in a variety of ways: Targum Yonatan (Sperber, 1992, III: 29): בנו אוי; Saadia ad loc.: והוש תלתאם מן אלג, and Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875) as well (607:9). The form אִיִים there is perceived as a plural of אֵיל (Lev. 11:14), which Ibn Balʿam ad loc. (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992) translated (אֵילוֹת = birds, fowl) and noted that it was a plural that was formed irregularly (הֵילָּה דַּי כָּלָה). For an extensive discussion, see Dotan – Basal, 2011, I: 106; II: 781.
42 See Jefet (Isaiah, I, 268a:5); on this, see Blau (2006: 504, s.v. חְסָקָה).
explanation is given only by Avishur (2000: 70) *ad loc.* (= it is similar to a winding snake). Others interpreted the term likewise but phrased it differently.43

4. *Central Arabic* مَفَازِيَّةٍ [mufāzīyya‘] = of the desert, from *Arabic* مَفَازَيَةٌ [mufāzayyāt]. This is the same translation that Abū al-Faraj used for *צִיּוֹם* (Isa. 34:14). These translations show that he believed that the word denoted desert rather than any specific animal, and derived it from *צִיָּה* (= a word that means ‘desert’. It is the same as Jefet and Avishur (2000: 58) *ad loc.*44.

5. *Isa. 14:23 – מִנֵּה* קִפּוֹד (zunfud) is the Arabic cognate of קִפּוֹד, with the sound shift: Hebrew “ד” – Arabic “ğ”. The meaning is the common one (hedgehog). The Hebrew word is here covertly compared to its Arabic counterpart.45

6. *Isa. 15:14 – מַזָּה* קִפּוֹד (zunfud) that is, like the previous item, *כָּפֶד* (Kāfī) – קִפּוֹד, with a Hebrew-internal shift between “ז” and “ד”, as Abū al-Faraj explicitly noted in his *al-Kitāb al-Kafr*:46


Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 32) and Avishur (2000: 59), too, translated *כָּפֶד* *ad loc.*, and Jefet quotes this meaning as a second opinion.47

From Abū al-Faraj’s derivation of the meaning of this word from קִפּוֹד (קנפד) (Deut. 14:5) we learn that he thought that the *hapax legomenon* קִפּוֹד is equivalent to קִפּוֹד, also an *hapax legomenon*, but with the last two letters reversed. According to Goshen-Gottstein (1992: 20), this is a species of animal, the equivalent of *גַּלָּל* in Arabic.


44 See Jefet (Isaiah, I, 143b: 14). Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875: 607: 8-9), too, explains: וְיָדוּרָא הַכֹּלָה לְכֹלָה יִרְשָׁא (= it may be that what is meant by this is the animals which dwell in the מִנְה; that is, the desert). Saadia, however, identifies the word *ad loc.* (Ratzabi, 1993: 30) without מנה ומכות (= owl). Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875: 607: 5-7) quotes Saadia’s explanation, which he introduces with the words פֶּרֶשׁ פֶּרֶשׁ (= it has been interpreted as), and Šorašim (Bacher, 1896-1897: 428): “It has been translated as a male owl, but this is baseless; it can be any owl”.


46 See Kāfī (Khan et al., 2003, I: 513-514).


Biblical exegetes interpreted *תַּן* in a variety of different ways. Abū al-Faraj identified it as *בַּנַּת אָוִי* ( بذلك אוי), in agreement with Jefet *ad loc.*. Ibn Janāḥ mentions this meaning but rejects it, because, as he claims, *בַּנַּת אָוִי* are small animals⁴⁹. Others identified it as a species of snake, etc⁵⁰.

2.1.4 Reptiles


Abū al-Faraj is alone in his translation of *פֶּתֶן* here as *מטֶון* (מאֲתָר)⁵¹. He uses the same translation for *פֶּתֶן* in the reference verse, and also for the *hapax* form *ש פִיפוֹן* (Gen. 49:17). He thus considers *פֶּתֶן* and *ש פִיפוֹן* as synonyms.

This definition is identical to Saadia’s in the reference verse (Qāfiḥ, 1996: 147), and to his translation of *ש פִיפוֹן* (Derenbourg, 1893: 78)⁵¹. However, in the verse under discussion here, Saadia translated *פָּׁתֶן* as *אע מן אלחיאתג֗ אלש* (=a kind of snake named אע [courageous]), as did Jefet *ad loc.*⁵².

2. צִפַּע עוֹנִי (Isa. 11:8) – עֵרֶבִיד (= a type of snake), as in *בֵיצֵי צִפַּע עוֹנִי* (Isa. 59:5).

Abū al-Faraj identified the snake צִפַּע עוֹנִי as עֵרֶבִיד (ארבִיד)⁵³, like Jefet *ad loc.*, an identification that I did not find elsewhere⁵⁴.

⁴⁸ See Jefet, Isaiah, II, 218b:8; Alfasī (Skoss, 1945, II: 719:20).
⁵³ In classical Arabic *irbid, irbad;* the colloquial form is בֵּיָרָד (irbid, arbid), see: Ibn Durayd, 1987-1988, II: 117[b]: 28-29.
2.1.5 Small creatures

1. **חָׁגָׁב** – כַחֲגָׁבִים (Isa. 40:22) (= like locusts), from (Lev. 11:22).

Abū al-Faraj translates **jarād** (like locusts), as do Jefet, Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 86), and Avishur (2000: 86) *ad loc.* According to Alfāsī, it is a kind of locust which [in Arabic] is called **jundub**.

2. **עָׁש** (Isa. 50:9) – עָּשֵׁת (worms), as in **יֹאכְלֵם עָּש** (Isa. 51:8).

**עָּש** is the Arabic cognate of Hebrew **עָּש**, with Hebrew “ָש” corresponding to Arabic “.IMAGE Trophy”. According to the classical dictionaries, it is the plural of **עֹשֶׁה** (= moth), and also means ‘decay’. Abū al-Faraj decided to compare the Hebrew word to Arabic **عت** (‘ught’ ‘worms’ because it suits the context in the verses in which it appears. The comparison with the Arabic cognate appears explicitly in Ben Barūn’s *muwāzana*.

Jefet and Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 113) also translated **عت** ad loc. Alfāsī thought that the meaning was ‘decay’, as did Ibn Balʿam, whose precise opinion is difficult to understand.

3. **עַכָּבִיש** (Isa. 59:5) – ענכבות (= spider), the cognate Arabic word (**عَنكَبُوت** – ‘ankabūt’), with the same conventional meaning.

2.2 Flora

2.2.1 Trees

1. **אֹרֶן** (Isa. 44:14) – אֶרֶץ (= cedar), like Hebrew **אֶרֶץ** (Lev. 14:4).

**אֹרֶן** is an *hapax legomenon*, and its meaning is uncertain. Abū al-Faraj identified it according to the context as ‘cedar’ (*'erez in Hebrew, 'arz in Arabic), with a Hebrew-internal substitution of “n” for “z” at the end of the word; in his *al-Kitāb al-Kāfī*, he

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55 See Jefet, Isaiah, II, 83b:2.
56 See Alfāsī (Skoss, 1936, I: 519: 39-40) and the same in Ibn Janāḥ’s *Usūl* (Neubauer, 1875: 210:22).
57 See Ben Barūn (Kokovcov, 1916: 83); cf. Becker (2005: 178): [...] *[= similar to עֲשֶׁת, it is] ... נָה* [*[= termite] [*[= mothworm]]*], and some say it is *[= termite] [*[= mothworm]]*). In classical Arabic dictionaries the word is usually defined as *[= mothworm]*.
58 See Jefet, Isaiah, II, 204b:9; 212b:9.
59 Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 435:12) on our verse: *[= decay and mold]*.
60 Ibn Balʿam *ad loc.* (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992: 204): [...] *[= termite]*.
61 Perhaps it should be identified with the bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*); see *Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, 1950, I: 596-597 (in Hebrew).
explicitly gives this explanation as one opinion:

[Isa. 44:14], it has been said that the “n” in it is a substitute for “z”, so that it is זָׁה אֶרֶז by context). In other words, he views it as parallel to תִּר זָׁה in the verse under consideration here.

The identification with אֶרֶז also appears in Jefet, ad loc.: אֵל אֶרֶז.

Abū al-Faraj implicitly compared it to its Arabic counterpart, like Ben Qurayš, who compared the two languages explicitly; Jefet and Saadia ad loc.; Alfāsī.

Abū al-Faraj, like Jefet, identifies the word here and in the reference verse with יְש לָשא (Zeph. 2:14). In other words, Abū al-Faraj considers תִּד הָׁר and תּ אַשּׁוּר as two synonyms.
for the cedar tree, with “r” in הָרָה replacing “ר” in הָרָה, as he explicitly argues in al-Kitāb al-Kāfī; likewise Jefet ad loc. (as a possibility)70 and Alfāsī (as one opinion)71.

2.2.2 Spice and perfume plants

1. כַּמוֹן – וּכַמוֹן (Isa. 28:25) – כַּמוֹן (kammūn) (cumin), from the context. כַּמוֹן is Cuminum cyminum. All other sources also either translate as Arabic كَمُّون (kammūn) or note that the meaning is well-known.


Abū al-Faraj also translated וּכֻּסֶמֶת in the reference verse as Arabic 걸ֶבָן (julubbān), as did Jefet, Saadia, Ibn Balʿam ad loc.; Ibn Janāḥ.72. The word appears in the dictionaries in a variety of pronunciations: Julabān, Julubbān, Jullabān, in modern Egyptian gilbān73.

3. סוּף – וָּסוּף (Isa. 19:6) – ואלדיס, from בְּתוֹךְ הַסוּף (Exod. 2:5).

דִּיס (Arundo festucoïdes) is the name of a plant with black fruit, from which an eye medication and oil are produced. Some have compared it to אֶסְלָ (smār, summār, sammār)74.

Abū al-Faraj identifies סוּף in the verse under discussion here as well as in the reference verse as Arabic דִּיס, like Jefet75, Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 39), and Avishur (2000: 63) ad loc.; others identify it as papyrus76.

4. קֶצַח (Isa. 28:25) – קֶצַח (= nigella seeds), from the context. קֶצַח is a dis legomenon that appears twice in close proximity (Isa. 28:25, 27). Therefore Abū al-Faraj translated it in accordance with the context in which it appears, like Jefet ad loc.77: קֶצַח (= qizḥa) in Arabic (with “z”), which in modern Palestinian

70 See Jefet, Isaiah, II: 139b:16; 140a:16.
71 See Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 752:30).
73 See Meyerhoff, 1940: no. 80, p. 122 – 42-43. Dozy (1881, I: 204) read jīlbān, with “i” as the first vowel, and noted that Lane (1863-1893, II: 440) has حَلْبَان.
74 See, for example, Ibn al-Bayṭār (1935, IV: 289). See also Löw (1924-1934, I: 556), Meyerhoff, 1940: no. 90, p. 47 [4, 1].
75 See Jefet, Isaiah, I, 192a:2.
Arabic is the name of the spice seed of *Nigella sativa*, a plant of the buttercup family. Saadia *ad loc* (Ratzabi, 1993: 58), translated *אַגָּמִים* (*ḥusrum*), like *בֹּסֶר* (*ḥusrum*), = and unripe grapes, as accepted by all.

2.2.3 Field and water plants


Abū al-Faraj also translates *אַגָּמִים* in the reference verse as *בֹּסֶר* (*Cyperus papyrus*), like Jefet *ad loc.*, who adds that here it symbolizes those in power. Others, too, have the same translation as Abū al-Faraj and Jefet: Ibn Balʿam (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992: 67) and Avishur (2000: 54) *ad loc.*, Al-Fasli, Ibn Janāḥ as well as Ben Mobarak.

2. בֹּסֶר – וּבֹסֶר (*Isa. 18:5) – וּחְצָרִים (*חֵץְרָם*).

3. גַל גַּל – וּכָּגַל גַּל (*Isa. 17:13) – וּכָּאלָדואֶר (*דָּוֹעַר*).

The literal meaning of *dawwār* is ‘spinning, revolving’. This is the word that Abū al-Faraj uses to translate *כָּגַל גַּל*, which in our verse parallels *כָּהַר וּמִסְתָּם*. He uses the same word to translate *כַּגַּל גַּל* in the reference verse, where it parallels *לָקַש*, where he also adds that this is a type of plant. From this, the meaning of ‘dry plants blowing in the wind’ evolved; today, the latter is this word’s meaning in Palestinian Arabic, at least in Galilee.

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79 See Denizeau (1960: 417); see also Lev (2002: 210), who mention other Arabic nouns: הב רַבִּית, הב סְדָא, תַשָּׁנִי. According to Löw (1924-1943, III: 122) *קֶצַח* is similar to cumin, but is black (cf. Ibn Ezra and Kimchi *ad loc.*).
82 Jefet (Isaiah, I, 106a: 5-14): וְאַלְבּוּדִידִי [...] וְאַלְבּוּדִידִי [...] (= and for [this refers to] the men in power). Targum Yonatan *ad loc.* (Sperber, 1992, III: 19): אֲרוּבִּי (= and a senior official, an officer).
83 See Al-Fasli (Skoss, 1945, II: 123:28); Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875: 20: 4-6); Ben Mobarak (2010, I: 70: 12-15). The latter two also mention another opinion, that *אַגָּמִים* is Arabic *קְמַעְמַּא* (*qumqum*), as Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 22), too, translates *כַּגַּל גַּל* in the reference verse. However, Saadia himself translates *ad loc.*: כָּאָלִפָּף (= and the [date?] branch), but translates *כָּגַל גַּל* (Isa. 58:5) as *כָּאָלִפָּף* (like papyrus). See the extensive discussion in Dotan –Basal (2011, I: 358; II: 701), and references there.
The word ריח is the accepted and obvious identification86. The meaning of ‘dry plants’ is also quoted by Alfāsī as a second opinion87; it would appear that this was also Jefet’s intention ad loc88.

Abū al-Faraj translated the word ריח with also in the reference verse (Exod. 2:3), as well as (Job 40:26), and (Isa. 9:13; Job 41:12) and (Isa. 58:5). is the accepted and obvious identification86.

Abū al-Faraj identified this word as Arabic نرجس (– narjis) also in the reference verse87 and derived its meaning from ריח in the verse under discussion here, for the word appears only twice in the Bible.

The identification is identical to those made by Jefet, Saadia, and Avishur (2000) ad loc; Alfāsī. ריח is the accepted and obvious identification88.

The words נけばהים are rare, and their meaning is not clear. The words נבקאוֹל are only once. It is, therefore, no wonder that they were interpreted in different ways89. Abū al-Faraj did not know whether they were (small)

85 Jefet ad loc. (Isaiah, I, 182a:5) translated ( = wheels), probably a reference to ‘dry plants that roll like a wheel’. On ( = wheel), plural באלפלך ( = the dust from a sieve), see Blau, 2006: 48. Saadia translated ad loc. (Ratzabi, 1993: 37): סכלרמשלון ( = like the dust from a sieve), see Blau, 2006: 476, s.v. גֶרְעַנַיִם. In glossary A5 (Blau – Hopkins, 2017: 199: 206) the words סכלרמשלון (Psa. 77:19) and סכלרמשלון (Ps. 83:14) are translated respectively as סכלרמשלון ( = in/as the [celestial] sphere). On כאלגרבאה ( = wagon wheel) see Blau, 2006: 515.
87 According to Löw (1924-1934, II: 156), סכלרמשלון is Colchicum.

Ibn Janāḥ in his (Neubauer, 1875) and Ibn Balʿam ad loc. (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992: 56) state that ( , ) a cognate of ( ) in Arabic dictionaries is defined as a thorny plant that grows on the plain, according to some in Hijāz. See, for example, Ibn Sīda, 2000, I: 410; cf. also Lisān al-ʿArab (Ibn Manẓūr, 1981, VII: 238b: 3-4).
plants or trees, and his proposal to identify it as 

\( \text{za’rūr} \) (= hawthorn)\(^{90} \) is tentative and unique to him.

Abū al-Faraj translates (Lev. 25:5). when threshing the grain, like a horseman).

It is a hapax legomenon which Abū al-Faraj translated according to context. He uses the same Arabic expression to translate (II Kings 19:29), another hapax legomenon. Clearly, he thought that these were the same word, with the letters inverted. In the context of the verse, would seem to denote the aftergrowth of the second year in which no sowing took place. The Arabic translation is literally as in Jefet and Avishur (2000: 83) \( \text{ad loc.} \), Alfāsī\(^{91} \).

It is a problematic form, for which Abū al-Faraj gives two explanations:

One explanation is derived from the context in the verse: , ‘grain that was harvested when still green’, which is the meaning of interest to us in the present paper. The word appropriately developed out of (with “” and his horseman), as in Avishur (2000) \( \text{ad loc.} \), whose dictionary meaning is ‘grain that was harvested prematurely when still green’\(^{94} \), which is how I translated it as well.

Another meaning, presented as a second opinion, is (and his horseman), in the singular, where the Hebrew term is compared to its Arabic cognate, (Crataegus sp.) is the name of the genus. This is a tree of the rose family, with two species in the region: the thorny and the Mediterranean medlar. It is mentioned in the Mishnah (Demai 1:1; Ma’asrot 1:3) and the Babylonian Talmud (Berakhot 40b): In Arabic was in medieval times also called ( = field apple). See Ibn al-Baytār, 1935, I: 163: 31 – 164: 15; Löw, 1924-1943, III: 244-256 (Mespilus Azarolus All.); Maimonides (Meyerhoff, 1940: no. 132); Lev, 2002: 204-205.

91 See Jefet, Isaiah, II, 50a:2; Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 344: 70-71).
92 See Jefet, Isaiah, II, 50a:3; Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 660: 31), as well as Targum Yonatan \( \text{ad loc.} \). (Ratzabi, 1993: 79) translates similarly: ( = aftergrowth fallout). According to Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875: 714: 15), ( = inverted), that is, with an inversion of the letters of ( = what sprouts from the roots of the seed).

93 Avishur (2000: 72) \( \text{ad loc.} \): , ( = and lays down his harvest), after Targum Yonatan \( \text{ad loc.} \): , ( = green grass ready for harvesting), and similarly in Ibn Janāḥ’s (Neubauer, 1875: 131: 1-2): ( = it is hay, that is, the grain whose ends are cut). See also Dozy, 1881, II: 360.

94 See, for example, Ibn Sīdā, 2000, VI: 202.
with Hebrew “š” corresponding to Arabic “s’”; the thresher is here compared to a horseman.

The interpretation is like that of Jefet ad loc.95, who translates וּפָׁרָׁשָי (with “š’”). In the commentary on the translation, Jefet mentions both definitions of וּפָׁרָׁשָי (Isa. 28:28) in the name of “others”: וּפָׁרָׁשָי הקלי אתה אלעבארה וּפָׁרָׁשָי (=: his saying, it has been said that this isアルくなり v. 28:28) [= grain harvested prematurely], as I said in the translation. It has also been said that it is he who rides on the sledge; this is nearer [the correct explanation])96.

10. ש דֵמָה – שַד מוֹת (Isa. 16:8) – דואלי (= grapevines), as in וּמִשַּׁד מוֹת עֲמֹרָׁה (Deut. 32:32). Abū al-Faraj also translated וּמִשַּׁד מוֹת in the reference verse as דואלי (grapevines)97, probably under the influence of the parallelism with ג פָׁנִים in the verse under consideration here and with מִגֶפֶן in the reference verse98. The translation is identical to that of Jefet ad loc. and Alfāsī99. According to Ibn Janāḥ, דואלי is a word in “the language of the masses”100.

11. שָׁמִיר וָׁשַיִת (Isa. 5:6) – גִנסין מן אלשוך יקאל שוך וחסך (= two kinds of thorns, some say: שוך and חסך), like שָׁמִיר שַיִת בַמִל חָׁמָּה (Isa. 27:4).

The word שָׁמִיר means ‘thorns’ in general while חסך (sawk) denotes several species of thorny plants of the caltrop family (Zygophyllaceae)101. This is identical with Jefet’s translation ad loc.: אלשוך ואלחס, while Alfāsī has the same words in reverse order: לאלחס ואלשוך.102

12. שׂוֹרֵק – סואריקהא (= its excellent grapes), from נ טַע תִּיךְ שׂוֹרֵק (Jer. 2:21).

95 See Jefet, Isaiah, I, 290b:8; 291a: 5-7.
96 Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 485: 125), too, translated וּפָׁרָׁשָי (= horsemen), while Saadia ad loc. (Ratzabi, 1993: 58) writes וּפָׁרָׁשָי (and his carriage).
97 See Blau, 2006: 219, s.v. דואלי.
98 Deut. 32:32: כִי מִגֶפֶן ס דֹם גַפֶּנֶם וּמִשַּׁד מוֹת עֲמֹרָה.
99 See Jefet, Isaiah, I, 169b:3; Alfāsī (Skoss, 1945, II: 652: 30-31).
100 Ibn Janāḥ in עיסיל (Neubauer, 1875: 705: 10-11), and Ibn Tibon translated אלשוך ואלחס, while Ibn Balʿam ad loc. (Goshen-Gottstein, 1992: 93) states: אלכרום בעינה (= actual grapevines). Latter Prophets Targum in Arabic (Avishur, 2000, ad loc.) has an interesting explanation: ענין שורק, literally ‘neck’. According to Avishur (2000: 200), this meaning follows Targum Yonatan (Sperber, 1992, III: 33): משרתי חם (= camps of Hebron), but perhaps this is a copyist’s error: ענין <ענין, as in Saadia.
In translating Hebrew שׂוֹרֵק (סריק), i.e., ‘excellent grapevines’\(^{103}\), Abū al-Faraj followed in the footsteps of Jefet\(^{104}\), Saadia (Ratzabi, 1993: 35), and Avishur (2000: 61) ad loc. Ibn Janāḥ in 'Uṣūl, too, uses the same word, giving a more extensive explanation: \(^{105}\)

3. Summary and conclusions

The book of Isaiah is filled with numerous words and expressions denoting objects in the material world, including flora and fauna, that were discussed in this article. The material terms from Šarḥ al-'Afāz that we analyzed in this study were translated by Abū al-Faraj into Arabic and explained using the Arabic terminology of his time. It is also possible that Abū al-Faraj relied on relevant contemporary Arabic literature.

The presentation and examination of the biblical flora and fauna terminology mentioned in the Šarḥ al-'Afāz and Hārūn’s translations/explanations, when compared with the writings of earlier and contemporary Karaite scholars and rabbinic commentators, teaches us about the material world of the Bible, as it was perceived in the medieval Arab world and Persia.

These biblical realia terms are very ancient, reflecting the material world of the biblical period. Many of them were not understood the same way by medieval exegetes; each interpreted the different terms and translated them into Arabic according to their understanding and the accepted interpretation in their own times and places. Therefore, it is little wonder that conflicting opinions arose among different biblical commentators in different times and different regions. Yet, it also happened that a biblical word was left as it is, without being translated into Arabic.

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Jefet ben ‘Alī’s Commentary on Isaiah:

\(^{103}\) See Blau, 2006: 294, s.v. שׂוֹרֵק.

\(^{104}\) See Jefet, I, 169b:13.

\(^{105}\) See Ibn Janāḥ (Neubauer, 1875: 751: 21-22) and Ibn Tibbon translation in Šorašim (Bacher, 1896-1897: 537): שַרַי ק (= the best kind of grapes, which in Arabic is called دسرك). Ben Mobarak (2010, II: 470: 5-6) translates very similarly in the reference verse and the verse considered here: גִּזֶרֶת אֲלַכְּרָם (= trellised vines), as in Menahem ben Saruq (Filipowski, 1854: 182 – Sáenz-Badillos, 1986: 390*: שורק כשריג), and Ibn Ezra ad loc.
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