

Fragment of the Month: January 2018

## **On autographs of Saadya Gaon attested in the Genizah: CUL Or.1080 1.85 and T-S 8D.1**

by Amir Ashur

Joseph b. Jacob Rosh ha-Seder is a well-known figure in the Cairo Genizah, with easily recognizable handwriting.[1] He arrived in Egypt from Baghdad and was mainly active in the period 1193–1211 CE.[2] Dozens of documents written by him are scattered throughout the Genizah collections.[3] He was also a book dealer, and many book lists written by him have been found.[4] The following book list, CUL 1080 1.85, however, has never been published.[5] At first glance this list does not differ much from his others, although we find here a book that is – to the best of my knowledge – not attested in any other book list: 'Maqalat al-'ibbur' by Isaac b. Barukh (11<sup>th</sup>-century Spain), a lost book referred to by Abraham Ibn Hiyya, Isaac Israeli and others.[6] Here, the second part of this lost book is mentioned, so perhaps there is hope that some of it might be found in the Genizah.



A closer look at this list reveals a somewhat more surprising reference: in line 11 we read:

מן הלכות גדולות נשים ונזיקין רק כט רב סעדיה כלה מא עא ז' כראריס

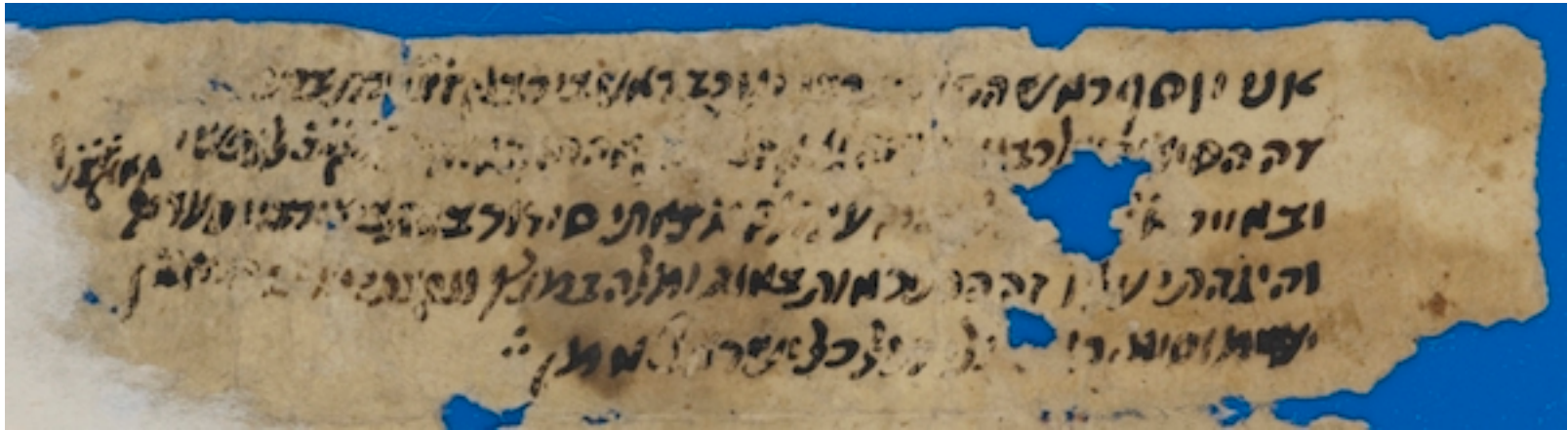
'from Halakhot Gedolot Nashim and Neziqin, on parchment, written by the hand of R. Saadya, all except for seven booklets'

This Saadya is no other than Saadya Gaon himself. This is evident from other lists written by Joseph Rosh ha-Seder, in which he always refers to him as 'R. Saadya', omitting his title 'Gaon'.<sup>[7]</sup>

But this evidence by Joseph Rosh ha-Seder needs clarification. How did Joseph recognize Saadya's handwriting? Was this copy of Halakhot Gedolot brought with him when he arrived from Babylonia? Are there any other references to Saadya's own hand in the Genizah?

Let's try and answer some of these questions. In another book list, an inventory of books belonging to the Babylonian synagogue that were stored in the Palestinian synagogue, dated 1080, a Torah scroll attributed to Saadya Gaon is mentioned: ומצחף תורה דכר אנה בכט רבינו סעדיה: [a Torah scroll, which is said to be written in R. Saadya's hand].[8] So, the synagogue had a tradition that this Torah scroll was written by Saadya.

Perhaps more reliable evidence for items in Saadya's hand can be found in a colophon, also written by Joseph Rosh ha-Seder:



Detail of T-S 8D.1 (recto)

T-S 8D.1[9]

אני יוסף ראש הסדר ברבי יעקב ראש בי רבנן זצ"ל כתבתי

זה הסידור שלרבנן[ו סע]דיה גאון ז"ל [באלק]אהרה באייר [אית']קייב' לנפשי

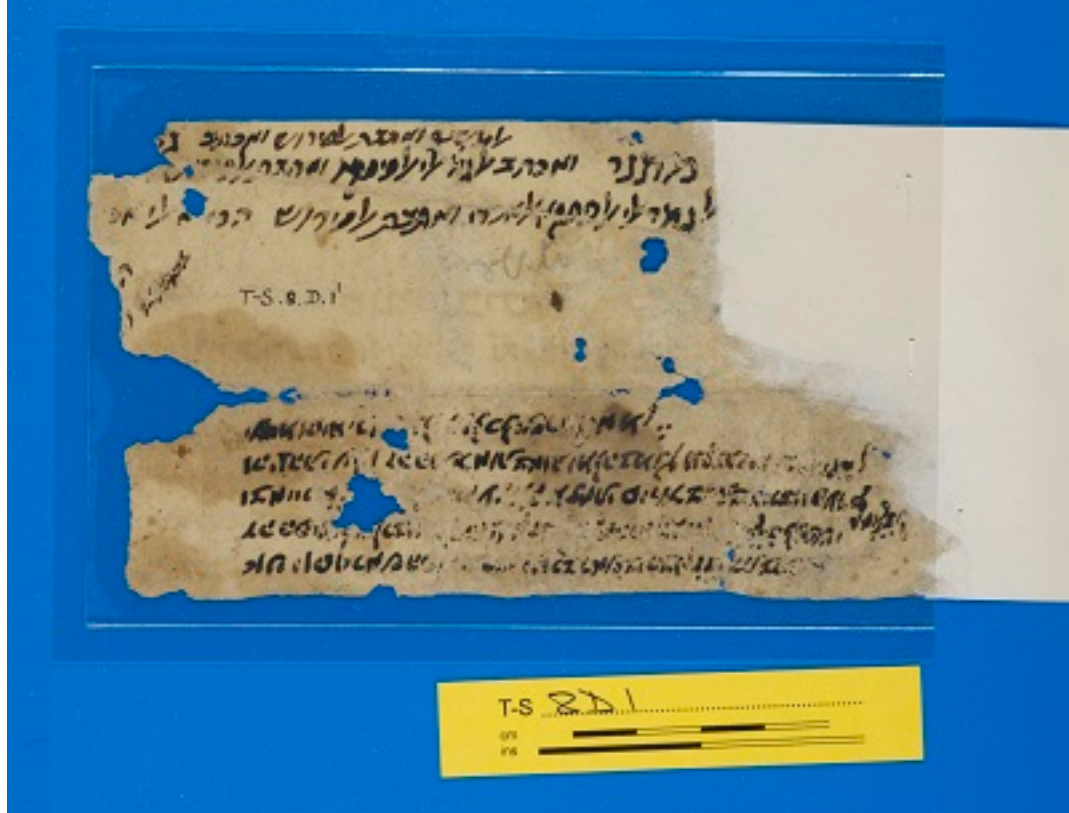
ובאייר א' [ת'ק' ] באלקאהרה עצמה מצאתי סידור בכתב ידי רבנו סעדיה גאון זצ"ל

והיגהתי עליו זה הספר אות באות ומלה במלה ונקדתי אותו הרחמן

ישימו סימן ט[ו]ב עלי ועל כל ישראל אמן

'I, Joseph Rosh ha-Seder son of Rabbi Jacob "the Head of the Rabbis' House" [10]wrote this Siddur of Rav [Saa]dya Gaon – may his memory be blessed – [in Ca]iro in the month of Iyyar [1]512 (of the Era of Documents =1211 CE) for myself, and in Iyyar 1[5...] in Cairo I found a siddur written in Saadya Gaon's own hand, and I've compared and proofread it letter by letter and word by word, and I've vocalized it. May God make it a good sign upon me and upon all Israel. Amen'





## T-S 8D.1 recto

In my opinion, this testimony by Joseph Rosh ha-Seder cannot be ignored: Joseph himself testifies here that he is familiar with Saadya's handwriting, and that he found an autograph copy of Saadya's Siddur – a well-known work – in Cairo. Joseph is convinced of his identification.

With that in mind, we should be confident in his attribution of 'Halakhot Gedolot Nashim and Neziqin, on parchment, written in the hand of R. Saadya', that it is correct and that there was indeed such a copy in his possession.

It is tempting to assume that somewhere, among the hundreds of thousands of fragments in the Genizah Collection, a page or pages, written in Saadya's own hand are hiding. However, identification of such pages is perhaps almost impossible. First, I suggest collecting all the fragments of Halakhot Gedolot Nashim and Neziqin that are on parchment, and comparing them with fragments of Saadya's Siddur (also on parchment). If we can find similar handwriting, then perhaps we are on the right track. Of course, it does not necessarily mean that it was written by Saadya, but we can never know where such discoveries might eventually lead us. I hope to be able to perform such an examination in the near future, and urge other scholars not to wait for me but to search for themselves. [11]

[1] This FOTM is based on a paper I delivered at the 16<sup>th</sup> conference of the Society for Judeo-Arabic Studies, Jerusalem 2013. I wish to thank Prof. M.A. Friedman for his comments.

[2] Recently I was able to identify a letter from 1165 written by him, T-S 24.60, but it is unclear where it was written. See M. A. Friedman, "On the Contribution of the Geniza to Maimonidean Research" (Hebrew), in *Maimonides and the Cairo Geniza* (M. A. Friedman [ed.]), Jerusalem (in press), n. 108.

[3] On Joseph Rosh Ha-Seder and his activities, see M. Lavee, 'Haggadic Midrash in the Genizah, as Reflected in the Book Lists of Rav Yosef Rosh Ha-Seder', in: *Uncovering the Canon – Studies in Canonicity and Genizah* (Hebrew), edited by M. Ben-Sasson, R. Brody, A. Lieblch and D. Shalev, Jerusalem, Magnes Press 2010, p. 39, n. 2.

[4] Seventeen such lists were published by Nehemya Allony, *The Jewish Library in the Middle Ages - Book Lists from the Cairo Genizah* (Hebrew), edited by Miriam Frenkel and Haggai Ben-Shammai with the participation of Moshe Sokolow, pp. 333-434 (no. 97-114).

[5] Menahem Ben Sasson referred to this document (regarding the book by R. Samuel b. Hofni in l. 2) in ראשי הציבור בצפון אפריקה הדמות והתדמית: היצירה הספרותית חו (Samuel b. Hofni in l. 2) in כמקור היסטורי, *Pe'amim* 26, p. 138 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23423559>), and in שברי איגרות מהגניזה – לתולדות חידוש הקשרים של ישיבות בבל עם המערב, *Tarbiz* 56, p. 188 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/70029103>).

[6] I am grateful to Prof. Sacha Stern, UCL for supplying me with this information.

[7] ENA 2539, l. 6; סידור רבינו סעדיה l. 40; סידור רבינו סעדיה l. 6 (published by Allony, n. 97). To the best of my knowledge, Joseph Rosh ha-Seder does not refer to any other Saadya in his book lists.

[8] T-S 20.47, Allony, no. 80.

[9] I am grateful to Dr Dan Greenberger for bringing this fragment to my attention.

[10] On this title, see S. D. Goitein & M. A. Friedman, *India Book I: Joseph Lebdi—Prominent India Trader, Cairo Geniza Documents* (Hebrew), p. 24, n. 10 and the sources cited there.

[11] I hope to publish this interesting book list in the future.

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