

RBL 08/10/2000

**Alobaidi, Joseph.**  
***The Messiah in Isaiah 53: The Commentaries of Saadia Gaon, Salomon ben Yerubam  
and Yefet ben Eli on Is 52: 13-53:12***

Bern: Peter Lang, 1998. Cloth, No Price Available, ISBN 3906760545.

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*The Messiah in Isaiah 53* contains a preface, transliteration and textual abbreviations, three sections (one for each commentary), a synopsis, and a biblical index. Each section contains an introduction, the Judeo-Arabic text which is “*not a direct translation of Isaiah’s passage*” (p. 9), and a translation of the respective commentary, with Alobaidi’s explications in footnotes at appropriate places.

*The Messiah in Isaiah 53* presents three different commentaries on the text, those of R. Saadia Gaon, Salmon ben Yeruham, and Yefet ben Eli. Although they represent an important segment of the exegetical tradition these commentaries are frequently ignored studies of the suffering servant in Deutero-Isaiah. All three commentators, which are of particular importance since they help to determine the attitudes of the Rabbanites and Karaites of the 9th through the 11th centuries regarding the “present and future life” (p. 9), are concerned with the specific identity and the nature of the righteous servant.

Although Jeremiah seems to be the embodiment of the righteous servant in R. Saada’s commentary, Alobaidi notes that R. Saada views the servant as paradigmatic. Jeremiah is only one righteous servant in the paradigm. Nevertheless, he is the servant’s primary exemplar (p. 19-20). On the other hand, the Karaites understood this passage in what Alobaidi views as a more traditional way. For the Karaites, the righteous servant is “the coming messiah” (p. 26). Unfortunately, given the extraordinary amount of scholarship dealing with the messianic idea, and given the focal point of the texts themselves, Alobaidi’s discussion of the messiah and the messianic idea is extremely brief and somewhat limited. Nevertheless, it is a meaningful contribution to the discussion.

Alobaidi does deal with significant problems, including that of the authorship of the commentary attributed to R. Saadia. Alobaidi makes an important contribution when, on the basis of both internal (textual) and external (response) arguments, he briefly marshals evidence to support Barthélemy’s identification of R. Saadia Gaon’s authorship of the first commentary (p. 11-17). Following Barthélemy, he places particular weight, quite

properly, on the external evidence as found in the responses of Yefet ben Eli (pp. 12 125-126) and Salmon ben Yeruham, whose own writings contain “polemics against the Rabbinate, particularly against R. Saadia Gaon” (p. 65).

Although *The Messiah in Isaiah 53* contains footnotes, for the most part these only explicate Alobaidi's position or they come from within the field of Jewish Studies, thereby excluding the enormous body of OT scholarship dealing with the suffering servant, which should at least have been included in a bibliography. Moreover, it omits references to and discussion of the other servant songs in Deutero-Isaiah, treating this text as if it stood alone. Additionally, and to the detriment of *The Messiah in Isaiah 53*, is the lack of clear boundaries differentiating between the meaning and importance of the data in the footnotes and those in the respective introductions. These problems render the book idiosyncratic at best. Consequently, despite the usefulness of access to texts in the Judeo-Arabic dialect, Alobaidi's methodology renders his study of somewhat limited use. Despite this, however, his commentary on the commentaries is, in and of itself, extremely important.

The resulting dichotomy is particularly unfortunate since there is an enormous body of OT scholarship regarding the Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah, but relatively little that is easily accessible describing later rabbinic scholarship and commentaries on the text. An academic study of the Judeo-Arabic translation, as well as the commentary and the commentary on the commentary would have been of great use to those in OT, for whom knowledge of pertinent rabbinic scholarship would be extremely useful and informative. And a broader understanding of OT scholarship would enhance the scholarly interpretations of those in Jewish Studies. It is yet more unfortunate, because Alobaidi's own commentaries, which are found in each respective introduction as well as in the footnotes to the commentaries, show that he has a great deal to contribute to an understanding of the texts he is presenting. In any case, as it stands, the work is interesting, and it may well be useful as a textbook in Jewish Studies. However, its academic presentation presents us with a conundrum: people in the two disciplines must use a work that one would consider academically unsound, but both would find of interest.