The Earliest Version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*

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First documented in tenth-century manuscripts and commentaries, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (The Book of Formation) was known throughout the Middle Ages in three primary versions. Two of these versions are similar in terms of their internal order and are distinguished from one another in their relative lengths—these are known to scholarship as the “short recension” and “long recension.” The third version differs in its internal ordering from the other two versions and is known to scholarship as “Saʿadiah’s recension,” as this version is embedded in Saʿadiah Gaon’s commentary. Compared with the short and long recensions, this third version has had relatively little impact on the reception history of *Sefer Yeṣirah* in the past millennium. More significantly, scholarly consensus has determined this third version to be a product of late redaction and artificial ordering.

In what follows, I will aim to establish the opposite chronology, namely, that the version known as Saʿadiah’s recension in fact reflects the oldest form of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. My argument and supporting research are presented in the following four chapters: In Chapter 1, I outline the general contours of the history of scholarship on Saʿadiah’s recension. I focus on how characterizations of this version as “secondary,” “artificial,” and “illogical” have persisted even following the discovery of an early attestation to this version among the Cairo Genizah fragments, and I suggest that this version should instead be called “the earliest Genizah-attested version.” In Chapter 2, I treat the unique structure of this earliest version. I present a novel structural division of the treatise into four chapters, each of which is further divisible into several sections. Importantly, each of the four chapters is organized around the same fixed series of lemmata, which, in principle, flow from the treatise’s opening section. While the sections of the chapters function as commentary on these fixed lemmata, each chapter is distinguished by a focus on a different topos. In Chapter 3, I briefly offer a new account of the reception history of this version: from its beginnings in the East, where it was preserved in Genizah fragments, through its transmission and exposition in the medieval period, and finally to its copying in early modernity. I contend that the many surviving copies of this version indicate that it continued to be copied widely and so impacted the transmission history of *Sefer Yeṣirah* despite its seemingly slight impact on the treatise’s reception history. In Chapter 4, I treat the chronological relationship obtaining between the three primary versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah,* basing my reappraisal on the above analyses of the earliest textual witnesses. I argue that the earliest version—reflected in both the Genizah fragments and Saʿadiah’s commentary—served as the base material from which the treatise was subsequently recast into a new format—namely, that of the long recension. This recasting principally consisted of rearranging the treatise’s sections into new divisions based on formalistic and technical criteria. This change in the treatise’s format left traces in the earliest variants of all of the various versions and can be identified by a careful examination of early textual witnesses. I will pay particular attention to evidence that the earliest version of the text suffered in one place an early corruption to its logical flow, traces of which are reflected in *all* subsequent versions of the treatise known today. I suggest that an exhaustive explanation for the seemingly enigmatic genesis of the various versions is in fact to be found in the various recensions’ gradual emergence out of the the earliest Genizah-attested version. This suggestion is presented against previous attempts to reconstruct the urtext of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. In conclusion, I will offer several suggestions concerning possible future research on the origin and dating of *Sefer Yeṣirah* in light of my textual findings. My findings constitute a novel proposal for the compilation of *Sefer Yesirah*, using an entirely different framework and methodology than has been employed previously.

# “Saʿadiah’s Recension”: Characterizations and Appraisals in the History of Scholarship

As mentioned above, Saʿadiah Gaon’s commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah*, completed in 931, contains a unique version of the treatise that differs from most versions circulated from Saʿadiah’s time to the present day.[[1]](#footnote-1) Apart from the dissimilarity in length and regular text variants, the most striking difference between “Saʿadiah’s version” and the other primary, more common versions relates to the *internal ordering* of the chapters (according to Saʿadiah, there are eight—) as well as to the *arrangement of the chapters’ sections*. In the more common versions, sections with identical openings are concentrated into the same chapter (such that each chapter consists of sections with identical openings). Meanwhile, in the version embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary, sections with identical openings are distributed throughout the whole treatise.

Though in several places throughout his commentary, Saʿadiah attests to minor variants obtaining between different texts of *Sefer Yeṣirah* with which he was familiar, he never attests to having known a version in which the internal ordering of the treatise was utterly different.[[2]](#footnote-2) Yet other early commentaries on *Sefer Yeṣirah*, composed not long after Saʿadiah’s, reflect a very different internal ordering of the chapters—one corresponding to the predominant form in which *Sefer Yeṣirah* has circulated for the last millennium. According to this ordering, the treatise in the main contains five parts or chapters, and each chapter consists of sections with fixed, identical openings: (Ch. 1) עשר ספירות בלימה (ten *sefirot belimah*; §§3–16); (Ch.2) עשרים ושתים אותיות (twenty-two letters; §§17–22); (Ch.3) שלש אמות (three primary [letters]; §§23–36); (Ch.4) שבע כפולות (seven double [letters]; §§37–44); (Ch.5) שתים עשרה פשוטות (twelve simple [letters]; §§45–55)[[3]](#footnote-3).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Over the centuries, only a handful of the few commentators who had access to Saʿadiah’s version remarked on the significant differences in the ordering between this version and the other more common versions. Thus, for example, Judah b. Barzilay of Barcelona (early 12th century)—who commented on a text corresponding to the short recension but also encountered a form of the version on which Saʿadiah’s commentary was based—viewed the latter as a secondary version, “confused from beginning to end in its lack of chapters.”[[5]](#footnote-5) So too in his commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah* (1331), Meir b. Solomon Abi Sahula remarked on the fixed structure of the chapters in this version.[[6]](#footnote-6) At the end of the 19th century, Mayer Lambert, the editor and French translator of Saʿadiah’s commentary characterized the order of the first chapters in this version similarly and even conjectured that this was the original order of the treatise.[[7]](#footnote-7) This conjecture was definitively rejected a few years later by Abraham Epstein, who described this version as, variously, “R. Saʿadiah’s unfortunate creation,” a unique albeit derivative variant of the long recension, and the result of “an artificial compilation of disparate parts of the book.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Epstein’s theory was subsequently accepted by other scholars.[[9]](#footnote-9) However, this theory broke down when a 10th-century rotulus containing a copy of a version very close to the one used by Saʿadiah was discovered in the Genizah. Examination of this version led to the assessment that the text copied therein in fact predated the version used by Saʿadiah.[[10]](#footnote-10) Even so, the fundamental claim that the version upon which Saʿadiah commented was the result of secondary editing has remained intact, and assessments of this version as both artificial and later than the two more common versions of the book, i.e., the short recension and long recension, remain the scholarly consensus.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Relatedly, it has become customary to use the long recension as the standard for determining the treatise’s ordering in editions, effectively dismissing the ordering of the Genizah-attested version (or “Saʿadiah’s recension”) and/or relegating the latter to providing variants (in the critical apparatus).[[12]](#footnote-12) The same set of assumptions is also reflected in scholarship on the genesis of the various recensions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* as well as in all hypotheses concerning the original form and version of the treatise: The short and long recensions have been characterized as earlier iterations of the text, while “Saʿadiah’s recension” has been taken to be later and secondary.[[13]](#footnote-13) Finally, the existence of vastly different versions and the difficulty of explaining how they developed have been used to support the idea that *Sefer Yeṣirah* was composed long before the date of its earliest textual witnesses.[[14]](#footnote-14)

As I shall argue in the following chapters, the old version reflected (with some minor variations) in the Genizah rotulus, in Saʿadiah’s commentary, and other early textual witnesses—and which I designate as “the earliest Genizah-attested version ”—reflects the oldest extant version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, from which the other recensions of the book eventually split off and emerged.

# The Earliest Version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*: Organized Structure and the Division into Chapters

# *The Earliest Version Attested in the Genizah: Proposal for Ordering*

Since the text contained in the Genizah rotulus does **not** contain a numbered division of the treatise similar to that known from Saʿadiah’s commentary[[15]](#footnote-15) (despite being very similar to the text embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary overall—), the structure of the treatise as reflected in the former (i.e., the rotulus) should be evaluated **independently** of the division known from the latter (i.e., Saʿadiah’s commentary).[[16]](#footnote-16) Based on syntactic and literary criteria, it is possible to distinguish exactly four chapters in this version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, the last of which is significantly longer than the others. Each of the four chapters has the same fixed structure, containing a sequence of lemmata that is repeated in every chapter. The treatise also contains two independent or stand-alone clauses, one at the very beginning, prior to the four chapters (the forward on the thirty-two paths), and one at the end (a clause on Abraham the patriarch), *neither* of which are included as lemmata in the fixed structure of the four primary chapters. Here is the structure of the four chapters including the lemma that begins each section and a new numbering (in the right margin, the numbers of the corresponding chapters and sections[or, *halakhot*] according to Saʿadiah’s division are indicated in parentheses):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| New Division into Chapters and Subsections |  | Opening Words of the Subsections | Chapters and *halakhot* according to Saʿadiah’s division |
| Prologue | §P | בשלשים ושתים נתיבות פלאות חכמה[[17]](#footnote-17) | (1, 1) |
| Chapter I | §I.1 | עשר ספירות בלימה | (1, 2–4) |
|  | §I.2 | ומידתן עשר שאין להן סוף |  |
|  | §I.3 | עשרים ושתיים אותיות יסוד |  |
|  | §I.4 | שלוש אומות א֗מ֗ש֗ |  |
|  | §I.5 | שבע כפולות ב֗ג֗ד֗ כ֗פ֗ר֗ת֗ |  |
|  | §I.6 | שתים עשרה פשוטות ה֗ו֗ ז֗ח֗ ט֗י֗ ל֗ן֗ ס֗ע֗ צ֗ק֗ |  |
|  | §I.7 | ⸨שבהן חקק [...]⸩[[18]](#footnote-18)  ראיה לדבר עידים נאמנים עולם שנה ונפש |  |
| Chapter II | §II.1 | עשר ספירות בלימה | (2) |
|  | §II.2 | ומידתן עשר שאן להן סוף |  |
|  | §II.3 | עשרים ושתיים אותיות יסוד |  |
|  | §II.4 | שלוש אומות א֗מ֗ש֗ |  |
|  | §II.5 | שבע כפולות ב֗ג֗ד֗ כ֗פ֗ר֗ת֗ |  |
|  | §II.6 | שתים עשרה פשוטות ה֗ו֗ ז֗ח֗ ט֗י֗ ל֗ן֗ ס֗ע֗ צ֗ק֗ |  |
|  | §II.7 | ⸨שבהן חקק [...]⸩18  ראיה לדבר עידים נאמנים עולם שנה ונפש |  |
| Chapter III | §III.1 | עשר ספירות בלימה | (3) |
|  | §III.2 | ומידתן עשר שאן לה[ן] סוף |  |
|  | §III.3 | עשרים ושתיים אותיות יסוד |  |
|  | §III.4 | שלוש אומות א֗מ֗ש֗ |  |
|  | §III.5 | שבע כפולות ב֗ג֗ד֗ כ֗פ֗ר֗ת֗ |  |
|  | §III.6 | שתים עשרה פשוטות ה֗ו֗ ז֗ח֗ ט֗י֗ ל֗ן֗ ס֗ע֗ צ֗ק֗ |  |
|  | §III.7 | שבהם חקק [...]  ראיה לדבר עידים נאמנים עולם שנה ונפש |  |
| Chapter IV | §IV.1 | עשר ספירות בלימה | (4, 4–8) |
|  | §IV.3 | עשרים ושתיים אותיות יסוד |  |
|  | §IV.2 | עשר ספירות בלימה[[19]](#footnote-19) |  |
|  | §IV.4 | <שלוש אומות א֗מ֗ש֗>[[20]](#footnote-20) |  |
|  | §IV.5 | שבע כפולות ב֗ג֗ד֗ כ֗פ֗ר֗ת֗ |  |
|  | §IV.6 | שתים עשרה פשוטות ה֗ו֗ ז֗ח֗ ט֗י֗ ל֗ן֗ ס֗ע֗ צ֗ק֗ |  |
|  | §IV.7 | חיצה את העדים[...] עולם[...] שנה[...] נפש |  |
| Epilogue | §E | וכשהבין אברהם אבינו וצר וצרף וחקר וחשב | (8, 5) |

According to this proposed new division, all the chapters in the treatise as found in the Genizah rotulus, i.e., all four chapters, have an identical structure: Every chapter is organized into a series of seven commentarial sections around the same seven lemmata following a fixed order. Thus, each section of each chapter serves as a commentary on the lemma that opens it, while the lemmata that are commented upon and the order in which they are commented upon are identical across chapters. The sections of every chapter follow this pattern: (1–2) 'עשר ספירות בלימה' (2 sections); (3) 'עשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד', divided into their three groups: (4) 'שלוש אומות א֗מ֗ש֗'; (5) 'שבע כפולות ב֗ג֗ד֗ כ֗פ֗ר֗ת֗'; (6) 'שתים עשרה פשוטות ה֗ו֗ ז֗ח֗ ט֗י֗ ל֗ן֗ ס֗ע֗ צ֗ק֗'; (7) a concluding section, which contains a reference to the tripartite division of the three trustworthy witnesses: עולם, שנה, and נפש, as well as a correspondence between this tripartite division and the numerical structures of the three groups of letters: three, seven, and twelve. In the first three chapters, the concluding sections contain a repetition of the formula “A proof for the matter” (ראיה לדבר) etc., and in the text embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary, all three of these sections open with a description of the carving of the world by God.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Let me emphasize again that this pattern can be identified in *all* chapters of the treatise—including the fourth and final chapter—if we admit a few minor variations and one notable exception. Still, the fourth chapter is significantly longer than the others, running nearly twice as long as the preceding three chapters combined.[[22]](#footnote-22) Each section of this fourth and final chapter contains an extensive commentary that is much longer than the parallel sections in the first three chapters. Even the sentence on the twenty letters divided into three groups—which in each of the first three chapters does not merit its own commentary—is the subject of extensive commentary in the fourth chapter. Another prominent difference concerns the *location* of this sentence and its explication: In each of the first three chapters of the treatise, the sentence appears in a fixed location where it serves as a sort of title, preceding the commentarial subsections that explicate the three groups of letters. By contrast, in the fourth and final chapter, it appears in conjunction with a commentary and in an entirely different context: at the heart of a detailed explication of the “ten sefirot belimah”. Moreover, its appearance in this context is perplexing, for it seems to disrupt the flow of the explication for no reason.[[23]](#footnote-23) In a later section, I will elaborate on the rationale behind this disruption, which seems to have resulted from an old copying error.

To summarize: Each of the four chapters that I propose we identify in this early version of the treatise seems to be a sort of commentary organized around fixed lemmata. The lemmata, in turn, are derived from the description of the 32 paths mentioned in the opening clause of the book as a whole: “ten sefirot belimah” and “twenty-two letters,” the latter of which are divided into three groups—“three primary, seven double, and twelve simple.” This basic description is expanded into fixed lemmata through the addition of commentarial elements: “ten sefirot belimah”; “*and their measure is ten, which have no limit*”; “twenty-two *foundation* letters”; “three primary [letters], א֗מ֗ש֗”; “seven double [letters], ב֗ג֗ד֗ כ֗פ֗ר֗ת֗”; “twelve simple [letters], ה֗ו֗ ז֗ח֗ ט֗י֗ ל֗ן֗ ס֗ע צ֗ק֗”; “*A proof for the matter, trustworthy witnesses:* עולם, שנה, נפש”. Through these lemmata, the treatise as a whole assumes a midrashic format consisting of several consecutive commentaries on the opening clause.[[24]](#footnote-24)

# *Distinguishing Characteristics of Each of the Four Chapters in the Early Genizah-Attested Version: Topos and Terminology; A Detailed Proposal for Ordering*

As I have suggested, an examination of the chapters in the early version—preserved in both the Genizah rotulus and contained in Saʿadiah’s commentary—reveals that the treatise has a balanced, lemmatic structure. It is comprised of four chapters, each of which contains exegetical sections that appear in a fixed order. Moreover, examining the contents of the four chapters in the early version reveals that each of these chapters has unique and distinguishing characteristics. In this section, I will suggest that for each chapter, it is possible to identify both main topoi and unique terminology distinguishing that chapter. In brief, these unique characteristics are as follows:

Chapter I is devoted to two main topoi. (1) Presenting the divided-yet-balanced structure of the sefirot as against the One Lord (or אדון יחיד). This topos appears both in a description of the sefirot as the covenant found in the middle of the two pairs of five sefirot opposing each other (חמש כנגד חמש, וברית **יחיד** מכוונת באמצע) (§I.1 [1, 2]) and again in contrasting the fundamental five pairs of opposites (beginning vs. end, above vs. below, good vs. evil, east vs. west, north vs. south) with the One Lord ruling over them all (אדון **יחיד**... מושל בכולן; §I.2 [1, 2]). The divided-yet-balanced structure is also prominent in the image of the three primary letters as two pans of a balance scale (כף זכות וכף חובה – ולשון חוק מכריע בנתיים; §I.4 [2, 3]). (2) Clarifying the foundation(יסוד) of the twenty-two letters as divided into their three groups, in a fixed way: “three primary, their *foundation* is etc.”; (§I.4), “seven double, their *foundation* is etc.”; (§I.5), “twelve simple, their *foundation* is etc.” (§I.6).

Chapter II is also devoted to two primary topoi. (1) A precise enumeration of the 32 paths into their groups, in which the following pattern of emphasis prominently repeats itself: The sefirot are “ten and not nine, ten and not eleven” (§II.1); The double letters are “seven and not six, seven and not eight” (§II.5); and the simple letters are “twelve and not eleven, twelve and not thirteen” (§II.6). The enumeration of the ten (three + seven) and of twelve is also the focus of the concluding subsection, on the three trustworthy witnesses (§II.7). (2) Prominent use of expressions drawn from Ezekiel’s visions of the chariot: The description “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” is interpreted using the descriptions of the living creatures in Ezekiel’s chariot vision (Ezek. 1:14). Prostrating oneself before the throne is also mentioned (§II.2). The “holy temple” is mentioned in relation to the center of the seven double letters, surrounded by the six-sided construct and next to the verse “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place” (Ezek. 3:12) (§II.5).

Chapter III too revolves around two main topoi. (1) The idea of silence and the limitations of thought: “restrain your mouth from speaking, restrain your heart from pondering” (§III.3); and similarly: “…think what the <mouth>[[25]](#footnote-27) cannot speak, and the eye [cannot] see, and the ear [cannot] hear” (§III.6); also “Know and think and form, that the Creator is one; and before one, what can you count” (§III.2). The expression “Know and think and form” — which also occurs in the beginning of the previous chapter (§II.1 [2,1]) appears once more in this chapter (§III.4). (2) An emphasis on the oneness of God. At the beginning of the chapter, we find “that the Creator is one; and before one, what can you count” (§III.2), while the end of the chapter contains: “the One who has none second to him […] for he is one and his name is one” (§III.7).

Chapter IV, the final and longest chapter, is distinguished by each of its lemmata containing a serial analysis of the 32 paths—i.e., the 10 sefirot and the 22 letters broken up into their respective groups. The first section is split into two parts (§IV.1.i+§IV.1.ii),[[26]](#footnote-28) and contains a detailed identification of each of the ten sefirot, which is subsequently repeated, in condensed form, in a separate section (§IV.2). The next section, on the “twenty-two letters” contains an analysis of the phonetic division of the letters according to where they are articulated in the mouth, as well as a second analysis of the structure of the 221 gates, i.e., the possible combinations of all the letters into pairs of two (should be: 231). As shall be made clear below, this section was displaced from its original location and inserted into the middle of the first section. In the three long sections on the primary, double and simple letters (§IV.4, §IV.5, §IV.6, respectively), the crowning of the letters is described in a fixed manner. Finally, the concluding section of the chapter (§IV.7) contains a reference to three trustworthy witnesses (עולם, שנה, נפש) as well as a structured account of how formation occurs through the letters (according to their division into three groups).[[27]](#footnote-30) As previously mentioned, this chapter is considerably longer than the preceding three chapters due to the length of the analyses contained therein, though its basic form and order match that of the other chapters.

To summarize: A study of *the contents* of the chapters of the treatise as contained in the early version—preserved in the Genizah rotulus and in Saʿadiah’s commentary—reveals that each of the four chapters not only has a symmetrical, lemmatic structure but is also characterized by a distinct terminology and coherent topoi. Thus, it is possible to identify a certain thematic logic that characterizes each chapter: In each of the first three chapters, the lemmatic structure emphasizes a different idea, while in the fourth chapter, the commentarial structure facilitates the detailing of the lists and the precise description of the creation of the sefirot and the crowning and formation through the letters. This identification of a fixed structure compels us to reject traditional accounts of this version as artificial and lacking order. As I will show in the next section, the description of this version as peripheral or rejected does not stand up to historical evidence.

# On the Circulation of the Version in the Genizah Rotulus and Saʿadiah’s Commentary

The designation “Saʿadiah’s recension” has been bound up with the anachronistic assumption that this version—i.e., the text of *Sefer Yeṣirah* embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary to *Kitāb al-Mabadī*—was actually produced by Saʿadiah himself, and accordingly, not used by other commentators.[[28]](#footnote-31) As mentioned above, this assumption was disproved with the discovery of the early textual witness contained in the Genizah rotulus. Despite the basic similarity of the text contained in the Genizah rotulus to that commented upon by Saʿadiah, the former is clearly not dependent upon the latter.[[29]](#footnote-32) In addition to both the valuable witness contained in the rotulus and textual witnesses to the independent branch embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary,[[30]](#footnote-33) today we can count several other early Genizah fragments that contain additional witnesses to this early version. Moreover, with the aid of textual-critical tools, it is possible to determine that these witnesses are also not dependent upon the text commented upon by Saʿadiah: MS Cambridge, University Library, T-S AS 214.278, middle Eastern script, 11th century;[[31]](#footnote-34) MS Cambridge, Westminster College Library, L-G Talm.I.11, fols. 1a–2b, Eastern script, mid-10th century–early 11th century;[[32]](#footnote-35) MS Oxford, Bodleian heb. f.48 (Cowley–Neubauer 2743), fols. 36a–43b, semi-square Eastern script, first half of 11th century (Land of Israel?).[[33]](#footnote-36) MS Oxford, Bodleian heb. f.48 (Cowley–Neubauer 2743), fols. 44a–47b + fols. 32a–33b + fols. 34a–35b, semi-square Eastern script, first half of 11th century (Land of Israel?) contains both a translation and early commentary in Judeo-Arabic.[[34]](#footnote-37)

Other early commentators of *Sefer Yeṣirah* used a text of the early version reflected in the Genizah rotulus and Saʿadiah’s commentary. Fragments of an early, anonymous commentary that seems to have used a text similar to the early Genizah-attested version are included among the many texts and sources cited by Judah b. Barzilay in his lengthy commentary on *Sefer Yeşirah*.[[35]](#footnote-38) Similarly, close examination of Judah b. Samuel ha-Levi’s brief comments on *Sefer Yeṣirah*, embedded in the fourth chapter of his *Kuzari* (completed 1140), reveals that the language of the treatise upon which he is commenting matches the structure of the treatise as known from the Genizah rotulus, Saʿadiah’s commentary, and the other textual witnesses listed above.[[36]](#footnote-39) The anonymous author of *Kitāb Ma’anī al-Nafs* (incorrectly attributed to Bahya ibn Paquda and composed, at the earliest, in the latter half of the 11th c., in Spain) also commented upon several dicta from *Sefer Yeṣirah* using a version that matched the one used by Saʿadiah.[[37]](#footnote-40) As mentioned above, Meir b. Solomon Abi Sahula’s commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah*, completed in 1331, is also based on the early version.[[38]](#footnote-41)

Moreover, numerous copies of texts containing the early version—sans commentaries—survive in medieval manuscripts. According to my analysis, these can be divided into four separate branches. The first two branches (I–II) are more defective. Both contain different versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* that have been combined. (I) The branch attached to the text assembled from Donnolo’s commentary: Several manuscripts containing an abridged copy of Shabbetai Donnolo’s commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah* from his Ḥakhemoni[[39]](#footnote-42) also contain a partial copy of the early Genizah-attested version.[[40]](#footnote-43) This is already the case in e.g., MS Parma, Palatine, Cod. Parm. 2784 [de Rossi 1390; Richler 1198] from 1286.[[41]](#footnote-44) (II) The Ashkenazi Branch: MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, héb. 770, Ashkenazic script, 15th century, fols. 41b–45a.[[42]](#footnote-45) The other two branches (III–IV) contain a complete witness to the early version. (III) The Italian-Hebraist Branch: MS London, British Library, Harley 5510 (Margoliouth 754), fols. 107a–110 (old pagination: 212a–218a), Sephardic script, 14th–15th century. This manuscript reached Vatican City in 1541. A few years prior, it very likely served as the basis for MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hebr. 115, which was written in an Ashkenazic script in Gradoli in 1538 by Paulus Aemilius. Aemilius, a convert, produced the manuscript for Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter’s Hebraica collection, as part of the Kabbalistic library (the copy of *Sefer Yeṣirah* is found in fols. 2b–6b).[[43]](#footnote-46) (IV) The Karaite Branch (in which the treatise is divided into seven chapters[[44]](#footnote-47)): MS London, British Library, Or. 1263 (Margoliouth 600), fols. 3b–6a, copied in 1433 in Karaite script;[[45]](#footnote-48) MS Saint Petersburg, Russian State Library, Evr. II A 380, copied in Eastern script in the 14th–15th century, fols. 1a–4b (incomplete);[[46]](#footnote-49) MS Saint Petersburg, Russian State Library, Evr. I 313, fols. 199b–203a, copied in Karaite script in the 18th century.

To summarize, the early text of *Sefer Yeṣirah* that was discovered in the Genizah rotulus and that was used by Saʿadiah in another variant can also be found in several independent branches: From copies of and commentaries on the treatise written in the East in the early 10th century to compilations of annotations and copies produced in various locales later in the Middle Ages. Thus, despite historically having been designated as “Saʿadiah’s recension” and despite previous attempts to classify it as a forgotten text, it is clear that this version was known in several different variants both prior to Saʿadiah’s time and centuries later. In fact, this version was well-known until roughly the mid-12th century and did not completely disappear even in the following centuries, when it was superseded by other versions. Still, there is no doubt that this version ultimately did not fare well in the course of the *Sefer Yeṣirah*’s reception history, to the point that it was almost completely forgotten over the course of later generations.

# The Relationship Between the Three Primary Versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* and Their Orders

# *The Early Genizah-attested Version and Its Order: A Structural Comparison to the Long Recension*

As was made clear above, comparing the version of *Sefer Yeṣirah* found in the Genizah rotulus, in Saʿadiah’s commentary, and in other early fragments, on the one hand, to the earliest textual witnesses of the long and short recensions, on the other, reveals a fundamental difference in the *internal ordering* of the treatise’s passages —beyond mere differences in the scope of their material. In the early Genizah-attested version, each of the four chapters includes the same, fixed series of lemmata and commentarial sections on these that are linked together in a sort of chain. In contrast, the main chapters in the long and short recensions condense all the sections that begin with the same opening formulae, such that each chapter consists of a list or series of annotations on a given opening formulae: e.g., chapter I contains all sections beginning with the words “ten sefirot belimah”; chapter II contains all sections beginning with “twenty-two letters”; chapter III – “three primary”; chapter IV – “seven double”; and chapter V “twelve simple”.All known variants of the long recension and all examined variants of the short recension follow a basically similar order, notwithstanding minor variations in the internal ordering of the sections concentrated *within* each of the chapters. It seems then that the *order of the chapters* in the long and short recensions basically corresponds to the internal ordering of the *sections* in each of the four chapters I proposed we identify in the early Genizah-attested version.

The considerable difference in the orders of the various versions begs the question: Which of the two orders more faithfully reflects the earliest, more original form of the treatise? Does the cohesive and fixed lemmatic structure of the early Genizah-attested version, proposed above, preserve the earliest form of the book—which was later subsequently split up by a compiler who rearranged its statements according to formal-technical criteria (the opening formula)? Or, do the collections contained in the long and short recensions bear witness to an earlier, more original form in which the treatise consisted of a series of annotations—which were only subsequently rearranged into a more balanced structure with cohesive units by an editor?

The first supposition, namely that the list-like structure of the long (or short) recension resulted from a later process wherein the cohesive chapters of the original were broken up and rearranged according to technical or formalistic principles inspires a logical explanation: the shift was *from* the original cohesive, logical, and orderly form *to* an ordered list mostly following the formulaic lemmata that guided the dismantling of the original order and its reorganization. This scenario not only describes a well-defined event, the reasons for which can easily be explained, either for practical purposes, e.g., to facilitate memorization, or in light of other functional considerations—parallels of which can be found in the histories of other treatises. This explanation is thus more economical than the alternative, widely accepted since Epstein, that the cohesive text contained in the early witnesses from the Genizah and Saʿadiah’s commentary was synthesized out of the raw material of the long recension’s formulaic chapters. Accepting the widely-held view compels us to see the transition between the versions as resulting from the intentional, creative, and meticulous editorial act of some later, unknown editor. On this account, the unknown source would have begun with chapters organized according to formulaic openings, split them up, and recombined them into a new, coherent, and logical structure—ultimately introducing an entirely novel, topical structure into the treatise as a whole. This explanation is thus infinitely more complex and contrived than our proposed alternative. Even so, from a *purely theoretical perspective,* it cannot be entirely dismissed.

To decisively answer this fundamental question, we will present in what follows textual and philological evidence, that supports the precedence of the early Genizah-attested version to the long and short recensions. In all cases, our evidence will draw from the earliest extant textual witnesses available. Our analysis attempts to discern which of the two orderings of the texts more probably reflects the original form by carefully comparing differences in the *placement and structure* of parallel passages across the various versions. We also consider syntax, style, clarity of context, and the internal structure(s) of statements and short textual units—and assume that only one of these forms reflects the original order and structure of the treatise. The following sections will treat examples of two phenomena: the deterioration of the lemmatic structure of commentarial statements; and an early copying error that introduced a major structural change into the text and left its mark on the subsequent history of the textual tradition. Subsequently, we will suggest an explanation of the emergence of the non-original form of the text as a result of secondary editing processes.

# *Undermining the Lemmatic Structure: The Deterioration of the Commentarial Character of the Treatise*

A comparison of the version contained in the Genizah rotulus with other versions from the early 10th century revealed that the sections of these two versions are placed in different ways such as to effect differences in the *substance* of the text. In the early Genizah-attested version, each of the first three chapters begins with a pair of sections explicating the ten *sefirot*: the first section in each pair opens with the lemma “עשר ספירות בלימה (ten sefirot belimah)” while the second opens with the lemma “ומידתן עשר שאין להן סוף (*and their measure is ten, which have no limit*)”. Here are the three pairs of sections that open the first three chapters:[[47]](#footnote-51)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| §I.1 | **עשר ספירות בלימה במספר עשר אצבעות** חמש כנגד חמש וברית יחיד מכונת באמצע במילה ולשון ופה. |
| §I.2 | **ומידתן עשר שאין להן סוף** עומק ראשית ועומק אחרית עומק רום ועומק תחת עומק טוב ועומק רע עומק מזרח ועומק מערב עומק צפון ועו'[מק] דרום ואדון יחיד אל מלך נאמן מושל בכולן ממעון קדשו עד עדי עד.  \* |
| §II.1 | **עשר ספירות בלימה** עשר ולא תשע עשר ולא עשתי עשרה הבין בחכמה וחכם בבינה בחון בהם וחקור מהן ודע וחשב וצור[[48]](#footnote-52) והעמיד דבר על בוראו והשב יוצר על מכונו. |
| §II.2 | **ומידתן עשר שאן להן סוף** צפיונן כמראה בזק ותכליתם אן להם קץ ודברו בהן כרצוא ושוב ולמאמרו כסופה ירדפו ולפני כסאו הם משתחוים.  \* |
| §III.1 | **עשר ספירות בלימה** בלם פיך מלדבר בלם «לבך»[[49]](#footnote-53) מלהרהר ואם רץ[[50]](#footnote-54) ליבך שוב למקום כמשתמר רצוא ושוב ועל דבר זה נכרתה ברית. |
| §III.2 | **ומידתן עשר שאן \*לה**[[51]](#footnote-55) **סוף** נעוץ סופן בתחלתן ותחלתן בסופן כשלהבת «קשורה»[[52]](#footnote-56) בגחלת דע וחשב וצור שהיוצר אחד ואן בלעדיו ולפני אחד מה אתה סופר. |

The text of the early Genizah-attested version contains a substantive correspondence between each lemma and the explanation following it: In each of the three pairs, one element in the expression *ten sefirot belimah*, explicated thrice in the first sections (§I.1, §II.1, §III.1); while the idea that the sefirot has no limit is the subject of the lemma opening the second section, also receives three explications: “forever and ever” (עד עדי עד; §I.2); “their end has no limit” (תכליתם אן להם קץ; §II.2); “Their end is attached to their beginning, and their beginning to their end” (נעוץ סופן בתחלתן ותחלתן בסופן; §III.2). In other words, the three pairs—each of which stands at the head of a different chapter— are constructed in a clear, similar and complete form, such that there is a complete correspondence between the language explicated in the lemma and the *contents* of the explications.

In contrast, in the long recension as found for instance in the early MS Vatican ebr. 299, all these passages are concentrated in a single cluster with five sections at the beginning of the treatise, where they also have a different order: the three subsections on ten sefirot belimah (§3, §4, §5) precede the statements that, according to the version contained in the Genizah rotulus, explicate the dictum “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” (§6, §7, §8). To illustrate this difference, the sections in the early Genizah-attested version are indicated in brackets on the right-hand side:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [§I.1] | §3 | עשר ספירות בלימה מספר עשר אצבעות חמש כנגד חמש וברית ייחוד מכוונת באמצע במילת לשון ופה ובמילת המעיר.[[53]](#footnote-58) |
| [§II.1] | §4 | עשר ספירות בלימה עשר ולא תשע עשר ולא אחת עשרה. הבין בחכמה וחכום בבינה בחון בהם וחקור בהן דע וחשוב וצור והעמד דבר על בוריו והשב יוצר על מכונו ומידתן עשר שאין להן סוף. |
| [§III.1]  –[§III.2] | §5–§6 | עשר ספירות בלימה בלום ליבך מלהרהר בלום פיך מלדבר ואם רץ ליבך שוב למקום שיצאתה ממנו וזכור שכך נא' והחיות רצוא ושוב ועל דבר זה נכרת ברית || ומידתן עשר שאין להן סוף נעוץ סופן בתחילתן ותחילתן בסופן כשלהבת קשורה בגחלת דע וחשוב וצור שאדון יחיד והיוצר אחד ואין לו שיני ולפני אחד מה אתה סופר. |
| [§I.2] | §7 | עשר ספירות בלימה ומידתן עשר שאין להן סוף עומק ראשית ועומק אחרית עומק טוב ועומק רע עומק רום ועומק תחת עומק מזרח ועומק מערב עומק צפון ועומק דרום ואדון יחיד א*ל* מלך נאמן מושל בכולן ממעון קדשו ועד עדי עד. |
| [§II.2] | §8 | עשר ספירות בלימה צפייתן כמראה הבזק ותכליתן אין בהן קץ דברו בהן ברצוא ולמאמרו כסופה ירדופו ולפני כסאו הן משתחוים.[[54]](#footnote-59) |

Apart from the obvious difference in the *ordering* of the passages and in addition to minor variants, an examination of the three occurrences of the clause “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” in the long recension also reveals a significant difference. While in the first instance (§4) it occurs at the *end* of a section and in any event does not serve as a lemma to be expanded, in the last instance (§7) it is conjoined at the *beginning* with the dictum “ten sefirot belimah”, further undermining the possibility that it stands as an independent lemma.[[55]](#footnote-60) Meanwhile, in the intervening instance (§6), it effectively appears in the middle of a lengthy passage (§5–§6)—and it is only in this instance that it appears in the same place as it does in the early Genizah-attested version (§III.2).[[56]](#footnote-61)

In sum: An examination of the long recension reveals that its structure has a technical character that exhibits two changes: (1) the words “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” are displaced from their expected position commencing commentarial statements; (2) the words “ten sefirot belimah” are added in certain places to unify statements. These changes do not only alter the balanced form of these pairs of sections but make it difficult to understand their content. In the final instance (§8), they even caused a misunderstanding, as the lemma “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” seems to have been displaced from the explication attached to it in the original (“their end has no limit”). These difficulties vanish when considering the Genizah rotulus, Saʿadiah’s commentary, and texts similar to these: in each of the instances detailed above, everything appears to be in its place.[[57]](#footnote-62)

The total undermining of the lemmatic structure of the sections (as reflected in the long recensions texts) made it such that the explicative function of the commentarial statements was obscured if not completely nullified. It thus seems that as the editor/arranger organized the text of the long recension into its formulaic form, he *failed* to recognize some of its lemmata as such: while he certainly recognized the repetitive formula “ten sefirot belimah” and integrated them into his organizing principle of the revised text, he seems to have dismissed the other fixed formula “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” and rendered it secondary. Under the revised, formulaic structure of the long and, later, short recensions—wherein each section condenses all passages that begin with a given opening formulae—the lemmatic function of phrases like “ten sefirot belimah” and “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” was rendered superfluous.[[58]](#footnote-63) This finding is further clarified by a careful examination of other examples.[[59]](#footnote-64)

The example treated in this section further supports the proposal that the text of the early Genizah-attested version and its branches represent the original form of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. When this text was subsequently edited into a new structure, some of the lemmata seemed to be superfluous, such that they were either misunderstood or occasionally, completely omitted from the treatise. Considering this analysis, it is extremely improbable that the relation obtaining between the versions can be accounted for in the opposite way, i.e., as moving from a disorganized state to one of cohesiveness. Such an account would require us to assume an extremely complex intervention on the part of an (unknown) editor, as well as a rather sophisticated attempt to change the form of the text.

# *An Early Disruption in the Early Version of Sefer Yeṣirah And Its Traces in All Subsequent Versions*

As shall be made clear in this section, at some early time, a copying error was introduced into the early version of *Sefer Yeṣirah* that can still be identified in the old Genizah-attested version, in Saʿadiah’s text and others similar to it. Moreover, this scribal error also left its mark on all other versions (and according to my analysis, the *subsequent* recensions—) of the treatise. I will argue that the traces of this error serve as definitive proof of the precedence of the version reflected in the 10th century—in the Genizah, Saʿadiah’s commentary, and other documents.

The fourth and final chapter of the early Genizah-attested version (according to the proposed chapter division enumerated above) begins with an explanatory list of the ten sefirot. The list takes the form of an enumeration (the numbers from one to ten are indicated below in boxes). However, for some indeterminate reason, the list is interrupted shortly after beginning and resumes only after several passages on another topic (indicated below with a gray background):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [§IV.1–I] | עשר ספירות בלימה אחת רוח אלהים חיים חי העולמים נכון כסאו מאז ברוך ומבורך שמו תמיד לעולם ועד זו היא רוח הקודש. שתים רוח מרוח חקק וחצב בה ארבע רוחות השמים מזרח ומערב וצפון ודרום |
| [§IV.2–II]– | ורוח בכל אחת מהן. |
| [§IV.3] | עשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד שלש אומות שבע כפולות ושתים עשרה פשוטות אותיות חצובות ברוח חקוקות בקול קבועות בפה בחמשה מקומות א̇ה̇ \*ה̇ע̇[[60]](#footnote-65) ב̇ו̇ מ̇ף̇ ג̇י̇ \*כ̇ט̇[[61]](#footnote-66) ד̇ט̇ ל̇נ̇ת̇[[62]](#footnote-67) «זֹסֹצֹרֹשֹ»[[63]](#footnote-68) הלשון כשלהבת «קשורה»[[64]](#footnote-69) בגחלת א̇ה̇ \*ה̇ע̇[[65]](#footnote-70) משמשות בסוף הלשון ובית הבליעה ב̇ו̇ מ̇ף̇ משמשות בין שפתים ובראש הלשון ג̇י̇ \*כ̇ט̇[[66]](#footnote-71) על שליש הלשון נכרתת ד̇ט̇ ל̇נ̇ת̇ בראש הלשון ובחיך ומשמשות עם הקול ז̇ס̇ ת̇ר̇ש̇ בן שנים ובלשון ישן:  עשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד [...] חקקן חצבן צרפן שקלן והימירן «ויצר בהן כל היצור וכל העתיד לצור».[[67]](#footnote-72) כאיזה צד צרפן אלף עם כולן וכולן עם אלף בית עם כולן וכולן עם בית ג' עם כו' וכו' עם ג' וכולן חוזרות חלילה נמצאו יוצאות במאתים ועשרים ואחד שערים נמצא כל היצור וכל הדיבור יוצא בשם אחד: |
| [§IV.1–II] | ויצא מתוהו ממש ועשאו וכאנו וישנו וחצב עמודים גדולים שאינו נתפס מאויר:  ⸨שתים רוח מרוח חקקן וחצב בם[[68]](#footnote-73) ארבע רוחות השמים.⸩ שליש[[69]](#footnote-74) מים מרוח חקקן וחצב בה תוהו ובוהו רפש וטיט עשאן כמן ערוגה סככן כמן מעזיבה חצבן כמן חומה ויצק מים עליהן ונעשו עפר כי לשלג יאמר זה \*קוו וריק[[70]](#footnote-75) שמקיף את כל העולם כולו בוהו אלו אבנים מפולמות המשוקעות בתהום \*ומבנים[[71]](#footnote-76) יצאו מים. ארבע אש \*מרוח[[72]](#footnote-77) חקק וחצב בה כסא כבוד וכל צבא מרום שכן כתוב עושה מלאכיו רוחות וגו'. חמש֯ ברר שלש פשוטות וקב֯ען בשמו הגדול ה̇ו̇י̇ וחתם בהן שש קצוות חתם רום פנה למעלה וח֯ת֯מו בי̇ה̇ו̇. «שש חתם תחת פנה למטה וחתמו ביֹוֹהֹ»[[73]](#footnote-78) שבעה חתם מזרח פנה לפניו וחתמו בה̇ו̇י̇. שמנה חתם מערב פנה לאחריו וחתמו בה̇י̇ו̇. תשע חתם דרום פנה לימינו וחתמו בו̇ה̇י̇. עשר חתם צפון֯ פנה לשמאלו וחתמו בי̇ו̇ה̇: |
| [§IV.2–I] | עשר ספירות בלימ֯ה אחת רוח ﭏהים חיים שתים רוח מרוח שלי­­­­­­­ש מים מרוח ארבע אש ממים רום ⸨ממים⸩ ותחת מזרח ומערב צפון ודרום[[74]](#footnote-79) |

This disruption of the apparent order also appears in the text embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary: the two sections treating the twenty-two letters appear as distinct *sections* in a way that separate the passages on the first two sefirot immediately preceding them from the rest of the list, beginning with the third sefirah.[[75]](#footnote-80) Next, the sentence that immediately follows the sections on the twenty-two letters is separated in Saʿadiah’s commentary as an independent clause (: “He created substance from tohu [Gen. 1, 2], and turned nothingness into existence, and hewed great pillars from intangible air”)[[76]](#footnote-81) in a similar manner it appears as a stand-alone clause in the rotulus.[[77]](#footnote-82) The connection between this clause and the words immediately preceding it is not at all clear, as the numerous commentaries attempting to explain this connection suggest. Moreover, in the text contained in the Genizah-attested rotulus, this clause is followed immediately by a repetition of the second enumerated element in the list word “Two” (שתים, רוח מרוח חקקו וחצב בה ארבע רוחות השמים), which already appear earlier, *before* the disruption of the list (§IV.1–I). It is very likely, that this repetition, just before the enumeration resumes, was apparently intended to alert the reader to the interruption of the text, and so to link the two parts of the interrupted list.[[78]](#footnote-85)

Thus, already in the early version attested in the rotulus, in Saʿadiah’s commentary etc., the original order of these sections was corrupted. Initially, we might assume that this corruption resulted from incorrectly arranging sections that had been copied from elsewhere—such as one of the other versions of the treatise. Such an assumption would also (conveniently) support the claim, widely accepted since Epstein, that this so-called “Saʿadiah’s recension,” is derivative or secondary. However, as already noted by Ithamar Gruenwald, both the long and short versions also seem to contain evident corruptions at the beginning of the enumerated list of the sefirot—i.e., in approximately the same place as the skip described above. In particular, such errors include the illogical placement of the brief statement containing a condensed enumeration of all ten sefirot in the long recension (§11), in a way effectively interrupting a more detailed enumeration of the sefirot already in progress (this dictum occurs just between the first and the second sefirot, §10 and §12, respectively); and more generally major inconsistencies in the descriptions of the second sefirah (§12) in various variants of the long and short versions.[[79]](#footnote-86) Accordingly, we must reject the initial hypothesis that the defective text contained in the other versions could have served as the basis for the broken version contained in the Genizah and in Saʿadiah’s commentary. To understand these various then, we must turn elsewhere.

I suggest that this corrupted order is the result of a copying error introduced into an earlier document on account of haplography (skipping due to similarities). When the scribe came across the words מזרח ומערב וצפון ודרום in the account of the second sefirah (indicated above at the top of the citation in a broken frame), he skipped to where similar words are repeated in the course of the list, i.e., מזרח ומערב צפון ודרום (these too are indicated by a broken frame at the end of the citation below). When the scribe finished copying and noticed his mistake, he went and filled out the rest of the list describing the sefirot that he had previously skipped. It is impossible to tell, of course, whether he did so on a separate folio, or that he used some sort of notation that was not correctly deciphered by subsequent copyists. Yet the result is the same: the earlier text of the Geniza-attested version was left permanently corrupted.

If this analysis is correct, we can take the entire passage that was displaced as a result of skipping (indicated below with a gray background) and move it to the end of the passage in order to restore the original order of the subsections. Curiously, the entirety of the resulting passage now reads in a continuous and logical manner:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [§IV.1–I]  +  [§IV.1–II] | עשר ספירות בלימה אחת רוח אלהים חיים חי העולמים נכון כסאו מאז ברוך ומבורך שמו תמיד לעולם ועד ⸨ועד⸩ זו היא רוח הקודש. שתים רוח מרוח חקק וחצב בה ארבע רוחות השמים מזרח ומערב וצפון ודרום|–|–|ויצא מתוהו ממש ועשאו וכאנו וישנו וחצב עמודים גדולים שאינו נתפס מאויר: ⸨~~שתים רוח מרוח חקקן וחצב בם ארבע רוחות השמים.~~⸩[[80]](#footnote-87) שליש מים מרוח חקקן וחצב בה תוהו ובוהו רפש וטיט עשאן כמן ערוגה סככן כמן מעזיבה חצבן כמן חומה ויצק מים עליהן ונעשו עפר כי לשלג יאמר זה \*קוו וריק[[81]](#footnote-88) שמקיף את כל העולם כולו בוהו אלו אבנים מפולמות המשוקעות בתהום \*ומבנים[[82]](#footnote-89) יצאו מים. ארבע אש \*מרוח[[83]](#footnote-90) חקק וחצב בה כסא כבוד וכל צבא מרום שכן כתוב עושה מלאכיו רוחות וגו'. חמש֯ ברר שלש פשוטות וקב֯ען בשמו הגדול ה̇ו̇י̇ וחתם בהן שש קצוות חתם רום פנה למעלה וח֯ת֯מו בי̇ה̇ו̇. «שש חתם תחת פנה למטה וחתמו ביֹוֹהֹ»[[84]](#footnote-91) שבעה חתם מזרח פנה לפניו וחתמו בה̇ו̇י̇. שמנה חתם מערב פנה לאחריו וחתמו בה̇י̇ו̇. תשע חתם דרום פנה לימינו וחתמו בו̇ה̇י̇. עשר חתם צפון֯ פנה לשמאלו וחתמו בי̇ו̇ה̇: |
| [§IV.2–I]  +  [§IV.2–II]  +  [§IV.3] | עשר ספירות בלימ֯ה אחת רוח ﭏהים חיים שתים רוח מרוח שליש מים מרוח ארבע אש ממים רום ⸨ממים⸩ ותחת מזרח ומערב צפון ודרום |–|–| ורוח בכל אחת מהן. |  עשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד שלש אומות שבע כפולות ושתים עשרה פשוטות אותיות חצובות ברוח חקוקות בקול קבועות בפה בחמשה מקומות א̇ה̇ ה̇ע̇[[85]](#footnote-92) ב̇ו̇ מ̇ף̇ ג̇י̇ כ̇ט̇[[86]](#footnote-93) ד̇ט̇ ל̇נ̇ת̇[[87]](#footnote-94) «זֹסֹצֹרֹשֹ»[[88]](#footnote-95) הלשון כשלהבת «קשורה»[[89]](#footnote-96) בגחלת א̇ה̇ ה̇ע̇[[90]](#footnote-97) משמשות בסוף הלשון ובית הבליעה ב̇ו̇ מ̇ף̇ משמשות בין שפתים ובראש הלשון ג̇י̇ כ̇ט̇[[91]](#footnote-98) על שליש הלשון נכרתת ד̇ט̇ ל̇נ̇ת̇ בראש הלשון ובחיך ומשמשות עם הקול ז̇ס̇ ת̇ר̇ש̇ בן שנים ובלשון ישן:  עשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד שלוש אומות חקקן חצבן צרפן שקלן והימירן «ויצר בהן כל היצור וכל העתיד לצור».[[92]](#footnote-99) כאיזה צד צרפן אלף עם כולן וכולן עם אלף בית עם כולן וכולן עם בית ג' עם כו' וכו' עם ג' וכולן חוזרות חלילה נמצאו יוצאות במאתים ועשרים ואחד שערים נמצא כל היצור וכל הדיבור יוצא בשם אחד: |

The advantages of this reconstruction are evident. Four principle advantages are as follows:

1. The subsection explicating the ten sefirot now appears in a single, uninterrupted, continuous sequence. Further, it is arranged according to the expected pattern of enumeration, beginning with the “one” and ending with “ten”—an enumeration that is repeated in brief in the concluding subsection that follows. In addition, the words that conclude this subsection (ורוח בכל אחת מהן) have clearly been restored to their proper place.[[93]](#footnote-100)
2. In the restored order, the two commentarial subsections beginning with the lemma “twenty-two letters” (עשרים ושתים אותיות) appear to correspond to the order indicated at the beginning of *Sefer Yeṣirah* (i.e., “ten sefirot belimah, twenty-two letters etc.”. As mentioned above, this order also corresponds to the inner order of the first three chapters in the early Genizah-attested version, Saʿadiah’s version, and all versions similar to these.
3. Restoring the passage that was spliced into the middle back to its original location enables us to remove the two artificial sutures that were created because of the skipping. Thus, the stand-alone statement on the creation of substance from tohu, which appeared to be extraneous in both the long and short versions, appears post-restoration in the early Genizah-attested version to be simply another logical principle that followed the skipping point. The case is similar for the second suture point as well. Here are the two new suture points, according to the proposed reconstruction (indicated by |–|–|):

[I] שתים רוח מרוח חקק וחצב בה ארבע רוחות השמים מזרח ומערב וצפון ודרום |–|–| ויצא מתוהו ממש ועשאו וכאנו וישנו וחצב עמודים גדולים שאינו נתפס מאויר.

[II] עשר ספירות בלימ֯ה אחת רוח אלהים חיים שתים רוח מרוח שליש מים מרוח ארבע אש ממים רום ותחת מזרח ומערב צפון ודרום |–|–| ורוח בכל אחת מהן.

Let us examine these two restored sentences:

[I] Restoring the *first* sentence reveals the original form of the list of the first four sefirot, respectively linked to (1) the Spirit of God, (2) *tohu va-bohu*, (3) the waters (תהום), and (4) the water, mentioned in Genesis 1:2. The restored sentence that treats the second sefira “Air from Spirit” (רוח מרוח) now concludes with a mention of the substance that went out of *tohu* and the account of hewing great pillars out of the air. Accordingly, the account of “Air from Spirit” now corresponds to the account of the third sefira “Water from Air” (מים מרוח)—as it is attested in *all* versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* —which also contains a reference to the first few existents were hewn (including *tohu va-bohu*). In other words, the stand-alone clause on *tohu* and the pillars now compliments a logical, coherent beginning, part and parcel of an overarching, complete logical structure.

[II] Likewise, consider how the restoration (and effective completion—) of the *second* sentence vis-à-vis the adjoining of the words ורוח בכל אחת מהן (“And the air/wind is in each one of them”)—which had been omitted from the end (and, as mentioned above, accidentally displaced to the end of the dictum on the second sefira)—helps establish it in the proper place. After the abbreviated enumeration of the first four sefirot (Spirit of God, Air, Water and Fire) and mention of the six cardinal directions, the element that is common to all six—air/wind (רוח)—is now added.

Thus, in *two instances,* clarifying the original form of the passage that had been disrupted produces a more logical and balanced text. This is despite the astonishing fact that we have no direct witness to this improved text in any of the extant versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah*.

1. Restoring the two commentarial subsections to their rightful place following the elaboration of the ten sefirot not only reveals the commentary on the sefirot to have a logical and coherent sequence but also clarifies the logical connection of the immediately following lengthy subsections (i.e., §IV.4, §IV.5, §IV.6), in which the idea of combining and crowning the letters is repeated in various ways.[[94]](#footnote-109)

These four advantages serve as evidence for the originality of the text reproduced herein; i.e., for the existence of a different form of the text prior to its order being disrupted as the result of a copying error, which permanently damaged the passage in question. This discovery not only allows us to reconstruct the early form of the text from which the version contained in the Genizah and Saʿadiah’s commentary proceeded, but it also constitutes decisive proof for *the precedence of this version* *over all subsequent recensions of Sefer Yeṣirah*! All subsequent versions also contain traces of the errors in the text that were produced as a result of the flipped order of the early version, even if these are sometimes almost unrecognizable.

Let us illustrate this with recourse to the long recension as found in MS Vatican ebr. 299. As expected, in this recension, passages beginning with the words “ten sefirot belimah”, appear in separate chapters from passages beginning with the words “twenty-two letters”. However, careful examination of the *borders* of these passages shows that even in the long recension, they appear with the artificial suture points already identified in the rotulus version. Here is the first—and in my opinion, distorted—sentence (with the artificial suture point indicated **>||<**):

[§12] שתים רוח מרוח חקק וחצב בה ארבע רוחות השמים מזרח ומערב צפון ודרום **>||<** ורוח בכל אחת מהן.[[95]](#footnote-111)

And here is the second sentence (again, with the suture point indicated):

[§19–§20] עשרים ושתים אותיות חקקן חצבן שקלן והמירן וצרפן וצר בהן נפש כל היצור ונפש כל העתיד לצור כאיצד שקלן והמירן אלף עם כולן וכולן עם אלף בית עם כולם וכולן עם בית גימל עם כולן וכולן עם גימל וכולן חוזרות חלילה נמצאו יוצאות במאתים ועשרים ואחד שערים נמצא כל היצור וכל הדיבור יוצא בשם אחד. **>||<** יצר מתוהו ממש ועשאו באש וישנו וחצב עמודים גדולים מאויר שאינו נתפש.[[96]](#footnote-112)

If, as I have suggested, we are dealing here with two instances of artificial suture points that resulted from a copying error in the source text and that are reflected in the version contained in both the Genizah rotulus and Saʿadiah’s commentary, the preservation of these distorted sentences in the text of the long recension can only be explained by assuming that *the long recension is dependent upon this other version*. That is, the source text from whence the version contained in both the rotulus and Saʿadiah’s commentary proceeded served, in its distorted order, as the raw material that was subsequently arranged into the long recension’s divisions according to opening formulae. Accordingly, the artificial suture points that had been introduced into the original text were also transmitted *in identical form* into the long recension.

Moreover, as shall be made clear in what follows, in the long recension, these suture points are accompanied by additional signs attesting to their artificial placement.

Signs of the copying error’s major disruption (again, known from the Genizah rotulus and Saʿadiah’s commentary and their likes—) and the splitting of the commentary on the ten sefirot up into two parts can also be identified in other versions. Clear evidence of this is preserved in early textual witnesses of the long recension. For example, in the text commented upon by Shabbetai Donnolo, the enumeration of the first two sefirot is separated in the same way as in the early Genizah-attested version: an out-of-place sentence interrupts the enumeration of the sefirot after the first two, separating these from the enumeration of the latter eight sefirot.[[97]](#footnote-113) Further, this sentence is followed by a repeating sentence that seems to restart the enumeration of the sefirot.[[98]](#footnote-114) Similarly, the text of the long recension in MS Vatican ebr. 299—which reflects a slightly different order from that witnessed by Donnolo—also contains a sentence interrupting the enumeration of the sefirot.[[99]](#footnote-115)

As the last examples show, different versions of the long recension illustrate different attempts to overcome this interruption in the enumeration of the sefirot. The same phenomenon can be identified in the various branches of the short recension. The interrupting sentence concerning the “twenty-two letters”—which, as mentioned, can be identified already in an early version of the long recension—was shortened to such an extent that it is nearly unrecognizable when it appears after the enumeration of the second sefirah (the elaboration of which is also seriously abbreviated). Thus, while the short recension seems to only present a continuous enumeration of the ten sefirot, careful comparison of its text with both the various variants of the long recension and the early Genizah-attested version reveals the history of the textual disruption embedded therein.[[100]](#footnote-117)

In conclusion, the early text recorded in the Genizah rotulus, Saʿadiah’s commentary, and other related textual witnesses reflects a very early copying error that affected the form of the text: Specifically, an instance of skipping due to haplography that was not properly corrected resulted in a passage’s order being permanently distorted. The copying error and resultant corruption can be identified not only in this early version, but also in both the long and, subsequently, short recensions. Finally, in light of this early error, we can determine that all versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, i.e., the entire textual tradition, connects back to a single early form of the text, or to a single moment in history in which the text was inadvertently disrupted.

# *The Early Genizah-Attested Version and Its Precedence to All Other Versions of Sefer Yeṣirah*

Comparing early texts of one textual unit as found in the three primary versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* has thus provided us with a valuable tool for systematically tracking the emergence of the different versions of the treatise. We argued that the emergence of the two major derivative recensions was determined by two major events: (1) *the treatise was edited and its sections sorted into a new ordering*, yielding the long recension; and (2) *this latter recension was abbreviated*, yielding the short recension. In addition, we presented examples of several textual phenomena that occurred in this process: the lemmatic structure of the original was destroyed and the commentarial sense of the various sentences was lost as a result; sentences that were connected for topical reasons were separated as a result of formalistic considerations; and contrariwise, sentences treating disparate topoi were connected as a result of these same formalistic considerations.

Our account of the transition from the form of the early Genizah-attested version to the prototype of the long recension presupposes a definitive event in which the treatise was copied from its original structure of four chapters with identical patterns to a new form in which the chapters are determined by formalistic considerations—namely, identical opening formulae. This transition broke up the lemmatic structure of the treatise’s early form: the lemmata, together with several of the commentarial statements accompanying them, lost their significance and were transformed into a sort of titles or formulae, as though they were words in a catalog or entries in a lexicon, punctuating the structure as a whole in an entirely different way.

Different reasons might have led the anonymous editor and arranger to institute this major change in the treatise’s structure. It is possible that he did so out of *practical considerations*, chiefly, to reorganize the treatise according to mnemonic principles or else in some more visually appealing format to facilitate memorization and recollection.[[101]](#footnote-119) Rearranging *Sefer Yeṣirah* in a mnemonic way and thereby turning it into a sort of database of cataloged lists might have served diverse purposes. It may have been adapted thus for practical purposes in which different formulae might be required (e.g., for medical or magical use)[[102]](#footnote-120), or, alternatively, cast into a form that was easier to grasp visually, e.g., for the sake of study—concentrating explications of its various topoi and terminology more economically. The systematic regrouping and reordering of the book’s sections may also have been linked to either generic or extensive cultural changes in modes of organizing knowledge. In this connection, considerations such as the development of the encyclopedia[[103]](#footnote-121) or the adoption of specific conventions for scientific writing[[104]](#footnote-122) raised previously in attempts to explicate the treatise’s presumptive original structure, can instead be seen as bases or catalysts for editing the treatise into a new format. More traditional literary forms might also have served as a model for the new form of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. These include: the numbered sections in the Mishnah;[[105]](#footnote-123) other halakhic collections that are organized according to fixed opening formulae from the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods;[[106]](#footnote-124) and in later periods, numbered midrash, such as the *Pirka de-Rabbenu ha-Qadosh*, which collected useful information from Rabbinic literature (principally the Babylonian Talmud) and arranged it into numbered sections in ascending order.[[107]](#footnote-125) These explanations are not mutually exclusive, and more can be added to them. In any case, it is clear that any explanation is related more broadly to questions about the history of *Sefer Yeṣirah* and the early stages of its transmission and circulation.

# *The “Urtext” of Sefer Yeṣirah Revisited: A New Account of the Dissemination of Its Primary Versions*

Earlier theories about both the original version of *Sefer Yeṣirah* and the development of different versions of the text have had an effect on the various editions of the treatise. Several past editors of the treatise have added to their editions attempts to reconstruct the supposed urtext of *Sefer Yeṣirah* with the aid of textual witnesses. The starting point for all these proposals, however, was the old assumption that the long recension antedated the version referred to as “Saʿadiah’s recension.”[[108]](#footnote-127)

In contrast, this study has presented an alternative method for reconstructing the earliest version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. According to this method, the text recorded in the tenth century and contained in the Genizah rotulus, in Saʿadiah’s commentary to *Kitāb al-Mabādī*, and in several other textual witnesses is that which most closely preserves the original form of the book in terms of its order and language—i.e., the basic text and form from which all other versions of the treatise known today proceeded.

The manner in which the various versions emerged according to this account runs contrary to that generally accepted in scholarship and completely removes all the confusion regarding the order in which the three chief versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah—*known from the tenth century to the present day—were generated. How these versions were generated from one another is most simply accounted for by assuming two central, formative events took place, both of which can be substantiated with extant textual witnesses, and whose soundness is self-evident. The first event consisted in the editing and rearranging of the early text, which yielded the prototype of the formulaic long recension; the second event consisted in shortening the long recension, which yielded the short recension, or more precisely, the abbreviated recension. Apart from these dramatic events, which left a noticeable mark on the general ordering of the treatise, both more minor and more focused editing processes have continued to take place over the history of the transmission of versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah*.

In light of this explication, it is possible to give a satisfactory account of the transition between the material in the early version to that in the new, reordered version, and subsequently to that in the version that was produced as a result of the abbreviating the reordered version. Even based on the earliest textual witnesses of each of the three extant versions (which undoubtedly are already at some remove from the parent text from whence they proceeded), it is now possible to draw a fairly complete picture of the transition between the various versions. Taking the sections of the text contained in the early Genizah-attested version and redistributing or sorting them according to their opening formulae into the five chapters with identical openings seen in the long recension (together with a sixth chapter of remaining fragments) successfully explains how most of the material from the early Genizah text transitioned into the form seen in the long recension.[[109]](#footnote-128)

When precisely these various versions emerged remains unknown. The standard account for the emergence of the versions not only left numerous textual difficulties unresolved, and it also generated confusion concerning the timespan in which the three recensions were formed.[[110]](#footnote-129) According to the account set forth herein, it is conceivable that all three versions emerged through a series of relatively proximate events that might have occurred shortly before the mid-tenth century when the first commentaries based on the short recension (and the latest of the three versions, according to my analysis) were written.

# Summary and Conclusions: The Textual History of *Sefer Yeṣirah* — Its Early Text and Structure

Study of the early transmission of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, based on its earliest textual witnesses contained in manuscripts and early commentaries, led us to a new account of the emergence of the three primary versions of the treatise. The unique form of the text previously designated as “Saʿadiah’s version” (due to its being embedded in Saʿadiah Gaon’s commentary) and here designated as “the earliest Genizah-attested version” was common in the Middle Ages in several different textual branches. It is preserved in both copies of the treatise and commentaries thereupon, from early fragments contained in the Cairo Genizah to manuscripts written in a variety of locales throughout the medieval period. Based on extant witnesses, it is apparent that up to approximately the middle of the twelfth century, this version was popular in several places—whether existing as the lone version or together with others—and even when it began to be neglected, it did not disappear completely.

Examination of the structure and order of the earliest Genizah-attested version revealed that the treatise was written to have four chapters, all of which follow a similar pattern of subsections, along with a brief opening passage preceding the four main chapters and a brief closing passage following the four main chapters. The uniform and cohesive structure of the four chapters contains a fixed order of seven commentarial sections, with each section beginning with a fixed lemma drawn from the passage that opens the treatise as a whole. In addition to this commentarial, lemmatic structure of each of the four chapters, it is possible to identify a focus on specific themes in each of these chapters, expressed through distinctive terminology.

A careful comparative textual analysis of the earliest textual witnesses of each of the three primary versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* yielded several pieces of evidence indicating the precedence of the early Genizah-attested version over all other versions. The clearest textual proof was based on the identification of an early copying error that occurred in the early version: An instance of haplography that was not properly restored resulted in sentences and sections being permanently displaced. This error left its mark not only on this version but on the entire textual tradition of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, such that its signs can also be seen in the other principal primary versions of the book in their different order. In this connection, we also presented evidence for how the text transitioned from the cohesive form of the early version to the formalistic and formulaic structure of the long (and subsequently, short) recension(s). It seems that this transition was accompanied by the displacement and erasure of the lemmata, and consequently, the dismantling of the treatise’s commentarial character.

A philological analysis of the early text(s) of *Sefer Yeṣirah* presented a vastly different picture of the emergence of the three versions than has heretofore been considered standard in scholarship. According to our analysis, the prototype of the text contained in the early Genizah-attested version (which was already subject to the aforementioned copying error) was used to edit *Sefer Yeṣirah* into the new format of the long recension. Thereafter, this new format was in turn shortened, producing the basic form of the short recensions. All three of these fundamental versions were disseminated independently, were subject to expansions, omissions, and other changes, and continued to split off into additional branches over the course of centuries. This new account accordingly provides us with the means of resolving most of the differences, both big and small, that can be seen from a comparison of the early versions—and moreover, in a systematic manner.

In conclusion, reading *Sefer Yeṣirah* in its early form—which over the course of the Middle Ages was pushed aside in favor of its later orderings—results in fundamental changes to the meaning and significance of this mysterious treatise, and should be central in future research concerning the book’s origin. Moreover, this new picture of how the various versions of *Sefer Yeṣirah* were generated lays the groundwork for a new critical edition of the treatise which uses historical methods not employed by any previous editions. Specifically, our research will allow for the creation of a more historically accurate edition that will enable us to trace the changes and branching off of the various versions of the treatise, as reflected in each one’s unique order and structure.

1. As is well-known, the name *Sefer Yeṣirah* is not used by Saʿadiah in his commentary, who instead referred to the treatise by its incipit *Kitāb al-Mabādī* (The Book of Beginnings). For Saʿadiah’s designation of the treatise, see especially: N. Aloni, *ha-Balshanut ha-‘Ivrit bi-Ṭeveryah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1995), 48–51; E. Fleischer, “On the Antiquity of *Sefer Yeṣirah*: The Qilirian Testimony Revisited,” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 71 (2002): 421–425; for a more recent discussion see: Tz. Weiss, “The Names of *Sefer Yeṣirah*,” in A. Bar-Levav, et. al., eds., *The Path of the Book: A Tribute to Zeev Gries* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2021), esp. 33–41 and the scholarly literature mentioned therein. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. On this subject see: *Sefer Yeṣirah (Kitāb al-Mabādī) with the Commentary of R. Saʿadiah b. R. Yosef Fayyumi: The Original and a Translation*, [Hebrew] ed. Y. Qafiḥ (HaVaad LeHotzaʾat Sifrei Rasag: Jerusalem: 1972), 83, 117, 127. In all these cases, Saʿadiah’s remarks are meant to indicate different variants only (on this, see also Qafiḥ’s remarks in idem., 9–11). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Following the fifth division (on the twelve simple letters) there come several paragraphs with irregular openings. These paragraphs should be conceived of as a sort of appendix chapter containing remnants.. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thus, for example, already in the 955/6 commentary composed in Kairouan and attributed to Dunash ben Tamim, we find that the version of the treatise explicated is relatively short (i.e., the “short recension”). See especially: *Le Commentaire sur le ‘Livre de la Création’ de Dūnaš ben Tāmīm de Kairouan (Xe siècle): Nouvelle edition*, eds. G. Vajda and P. B. Fenton (*Collection de la Revue des Études Juives*, 24) (Paris : E. Peeters, 2002), 1–20 (i.e., the editor’s introduction). For other early commentaries based on this recension, see: A. Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*,” [Hebrew] *Tarbiz* 89 (2023): 233–234 n.4 This appendix chapter is also found in Shabbetai Donnolo’s tenth-century commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah*, *The Book of Ḥakhmoni,* which is based on a longer version (i.e., the “long recension”). This version is closer, in terms of its scope, to the version found in Saʿadiah’s commentary, however, the ordering of its chapters is more similar to that found in the short recension than to that found in Saʿadiah’s version. Donnolo himself divided *Sefer Yeṣirah* into three books or parts, on which see especially: *Shabbatai Donnolo’s Sefer Ḥakhmoni*, ed. P. Mancuso, (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), 179–180; 186; 195–196. A version of the treatise close in both scope and ordering to that known by Donnolo is preserved in a copy from eleventh-century Italy (Ms Vatican, Apostolic Library, ebr. 299), fols. 66a–71b, which is generally accepted as the oldest witness to the long recension. This version was taken to be the primary text in Gruenwald’s diplomatic edition. See: I. Gruenwald, “A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezira*,” *Israeli Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 132–177 [designated as A]. This version also served as one of the primary versions for I. Weinstock’s eclectic edition in “Towards an Explication of the Text of *Sefer Yeṣirah,*” [Hebrew] *Temirin* 1 (1972): 26–58 [designated as ב1]. Again likewise, this text was also taken to be a main textual witness and guiding text in terms of its ordering of the subsections of the long recension by Hayman in his scientific edition. See: *Sefer Yeṣira: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary*, ed. A. P. Hayman, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004 [designated as A]. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Judah b. Barzilay of Barcelona, *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah*, ed. Halberstam (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1885), 207, 221 (compare also: 105, 213). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Meir b. Solomon Abi Sahula, *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah*, MS Rome, Angelica Or. 45, fols. 1a–193b. Abi Sahula remarks on the symmetrical structure of the chapters on fols. 123b–124a. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See *Commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira, ou Livre de la création par le gaon Saadya de Fayyoum*, ed. M. Lambert, Paris: É. Bouillon 1891, v–vi; and especially, idem., “[On] ‘Das Buch der Schöpfung, nach den sämmtlichen Recensionen möglichst kritisch redigirter Text, nebst Uebersetzung, Varianten, Anmerkungen, Erklärungen und einer ausführlichen Einleitung, von Lazarus Goldschmidt, 1894”, *Revue des Études Juives*, 29 (1894), 312. In his appraisal, Lambert referred in particular to the first three chapters of the treatise according to the division found in Saʿadiah’s version. A similar yet more detailed description of the principles of order in Saʿadiah’s version is given by Weinstock, who apparently was unfamiliar with the account of his predecessor (note 11 below). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A. Epstein, “Pseudo–Saadja’s und Elasar Rokeach’s Commentare zum Jezira-Buche. Die Recension Saadja’s,” *MGWJ*, 37 (1893): 119–120; idem, “Studien zum Jezira-Buche und seinen Erklärern,” ibid., 267–268. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See especially: *Das Buch der Schöpfung: nach den sämmtlichen Recensionen möglichst kritisch redigirter und vocalisirter Text, nebst Uebersetzung, Varianten, Anmerkungen, Erklärungen und einer ausführlichen Einleitung*, ed. L. Goldschmidt (Frankfurt a. M.: In Commission bei J. Kauffmann, 1894), 27–28; L. Ginzberg, “Sefer Yeẓirah, ” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, VI (New York and London, 1904) 605–606; G. Vajda, ‘Le Commentaire de Saʿadiah sur le Séfer Yeçîra”, *Revue des Études Juives*, 106 (1941), 65; idem, “Sa‛adyā commentateur du ‘Livre de la Création’”, *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire 1959–1960* (Paris, 1958) 5; G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Keter Publishing House: Jerusalem, 1974), 23, 28; Weinstock, “Towards an Explication” (note 4 above), 11 (but cf. Qafiḥ, *Sefer Yeṣirah* [note 2 above], 10–11); I. Gruenwald, ‘Some Critical Notes on the First Part of SĒFER YEZĪRĀ’, *Revue des Études Juives*, 132 (1973), 476–477; N. Séd, “Le Sēfer Yezīrā: L’édition critique, le texte primitif, la grammaire et la métaphysique”, ibid., 515; likewise see: R.C. Kiener, “Saʿadiah and the Sefer Yetzîrah: Translation Theory in Classical Jewish Thought”, Sh. Biderman and B. Scharfstein, *Interpretation in Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 170; Aloni, *ha-Balshanut ha-‘Ivrit* [see note 1 above], 49–50 and note 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The most substantial part of the rotulus (MS Cambridge, University Library, T-S 32.5) was discovered by Haberman. See: A. M. Haberman, “*Avanim le-heker* *Sefer Yeṣirah,*” [Hebrew] *Sinai* 20 (1947): 341–350. Haberman claimed that the text reflected in the rotulus predated Saʿadiah (idem., 342). When additional parts of the rotulus were later discovered (T-S K 21.56+T-S 12.813) and the complete text was published by Aloni, Weinstock reinforced this assessment. See: N. Aloni, “*Sefer Yeṣirah* of R. Saʿadiah in the Form of a Scroll from the Cairo Geniza,” [Hebrew] *Temirin* 2 (1981), 9–29 (reprinted in idem., *Studies in Medieval Philology and Literature: Collected Papers*, vol. 1: “Chapters on R. Saʿadiah Gaon,” [Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1986], 335–355); I. Weinstock, “Towards an Elucidation of the Character and Metamorphosis of *Sefer Yeṣirah* as found in Saʿadiah’s Text,” [Hebrew] *Temirin* 2 (1981), 31–39. See also: H. Ben-Shammai, “Saadya’s Goal in his Commentary on Sefer Yeẓira”, R. Link-Salinger et al., eds., *A Straight Path: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 8–9.. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See: Weinstock, “Towards a Clarification” (note 4 above), 15–16; Gruenwald, “Some Critical Notes” (note 9 above), 476–477; see also the summary in Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 4 above) 39–41. For a unique appraisal, see: Weinstock, “Towards an Elucidation” (note 10 above), 33–34, who proposed that the *last* four chapters of the treatise (according to the division to eight chapters known from Saʿadiah’s commentary)—which contain a detailed elaboration of the formation as carried out by each of the letters, divided into groups—contain late additions to the treatise, which were subsequently split up and recombined into the chapters of the long version. Weinstock also surmised that the unique ordering of these additions inspired the “ancient sage” who edited Saʿadiah’s version “to also arrange all the earlier material in *Sefer Yeṣirah* according to a parallel system”(!) (idem., 38).. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Such was the case in Goldschmidt’s pioneering edition, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 9 above), and especially pp. 25–29. See also: Weinstock, “Towards an Explication” (note 4 above), especially 16–18, 22–24. Gruenwald, “Critical Edition” (note 4 above). A synoptic edition of *Sefer Yeṣirah* appeared much later, in which all three of the primary versions were edited. However, the synoptic format required them to impose the order of one of the versions on the others; following Gruenwald’s version, the editors decided to use the long recension (as occurs in MS Vatican ebr. 299, and which, according to Gruenwald’s division, is broken up into 64 sections). See the edition of Legouas, *Une traduction comparée de quatre versions du Sefer Yetsirah précédée d’une présentation de l’ouvrage*, ed. J. Y. Legouas, Lyon 1991. Likewise, see the edition of Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣira* (note 4 above), especially 6–12, 33–41; and compare earlier: A. P. Hayman, “The ‘Original Text’: A Scholarly Illusion? ”; J. Davies, G. Harvey and W. G. E. Watson (eds.), *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 434–449. An exception to the trend above is Hermann’s edition and translation into German, which presents each of the three primary versions separately and in its own order: *Sefer Jeẓira: Buch der Schöpfung*, ed. K. Herrmann, (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008), 9–129. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For proposals on the ways in which the main versions were developed and broken up into sections and for the various editorial and compilatory methods associated with each, see below, end of the Ch.4, and especially note 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For summary discussions of this issue, see especially: Hayman, *Sefer Yesira* (note 4 above), 33–41; J. Dan, *Toledot Torat ha-Sod ha-Ivrit*: *The Ancient Period*, vol. 2 [Hebrew] (Shazar Center: Jerusalem, 2009), 554–565; and compare with his earlier remarks in J. Dan, ‘Three Phases of the History of the *Sefer Yezira*’, *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*, 21 (1994), 7–29. See also: Hermann, *Sefer Yesirah* (note 12 above), 204–218; D. Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*2, (Magnes Press & Cherub Press: Jerusalem and Los Angeles, 2013) 457–464; compare idem., 36–27; and Tz. Weiss, *Sefer Yeṣirah and its Contexts: Other Jewish Voices* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2018), 12–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For the debate as to whether Saʿadiah is actually responsible for this division, or whether it was the work of a later reader, see near note 8 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In further support of this is the paratextual fact that the scribe of the rotulus text placed caesurae between subjects, supposedly indicating a basic division of the treatise, on which see: Aloni, “*Sefer Yeṣirah*” (note 10 above), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. These words, which are written at the beginning of the Genizah rotulus, have been damaged by weathering and are reconstructed with the aid of the rest of subsections from the earliest extant version. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. These words, both here and in subsection §II.7, are missing in the Genizah rotulus, and have been added parenthetically based on their appearance in the text in both Saʿadiah’s commentary and other textual witnesses to this version, on which see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. §§IV.2–IV.3 are listed here in the order of their appearance in all witnesses to this early version—in the Genizah, in Saʿadiah’s version, and others. However, their numbering is deliberately reversed in the table (§IV.3 before §IV.2). This is explicated in detail in what follows. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The words in the square brackets are missing in all the textual witnesses of this version, probably due to corruption, and is restored here prior to §IV.4; on this restoration and its significance, see Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 285 n.218. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The enumeration of the three *halakhot* according to Saʿadiah’s division is: 1:4; 2:5; 3:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This might explain Saʿadiah’s division of the treatise into five short chapters as one based on utilitarian considerations, rather than on structural or literary logic. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. That is, in the Genizah rotulus, in Saʿadiah’s text and in all witnesses of this early version, the enumeration of the first two sefirot is immediately followed by the phrase “twenty-two letters etc.” which is in turn followed by two explicatory passages. The first explains the division of twenty-two letters according to their points of articulation in one of the five parts of the mouth, while the second explains the idea that twenty-two letters can be combined into 221 (or: 231) gates. Only afterwards does the elaboration of the sefirot resume, repeating enumeration of the second sefirah and afterwards completing the list of the ten sefirot. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This numerical structure—ten, twenty-two, three, seven, twelve—occurs again at the end of the passage that concludes the treatise as a whole (§E), although this conclusion is not attested in most witnesses of this version. A rare exception is MS Cambridge, University Library, T-S AS 214.278 fol. 2, lines 1–4. It should be noted that this conclusion also occurs in texts of the long recension (§61b). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Completed according to MS Oxford Poc. 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
26. This split is discussed further below. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
27. Additionally, 'תלי וגלגל ולב', which is mentioned at the end of this subsection, also appears in the final subsection of chapter 1 (§I.7), where they correspond to world, year, and soul. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
28. See esp. above note 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
29. See Haberman’s and Aloni’s descriptions in their respective studies, mentioned in note 10 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
30. Saʿadiah’s commentary is preserved in its entirety in MS Oxford Poc. 256. This manuscript was written in an eastern script in Baghdad in 1263 and served as the basis for two editions of the treatise. See: Lambert, *Commentaire* (note 7 above); Qafiḥ, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 2 above). Fragments of the commentary are known from other manuscripts, especially from the Genizah. For a list of these manuscripts, see: Qafiḥ, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (idem), 7; Aloni, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 10 above), 11 sections 1–5. To the manuscripts enumerated there should be added MS Saint Petersburg, Russian State Library, Evr. Arab. I 3071, fols. 1a–5b; MS Saint Petersburg, Russian State Library, Evr. Arab. II 1068, fols. 1a–4b. In the middle ages, Saʿadiah’s commentary was translated fully, in abridgements, and in fragmentary form by a several different translators. For a list, see: M. Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher: Ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte des Mittelalters, meist nach handschriftlichen Quellen*, (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893), 443–445; H. Malter, *Saadia Gaon: His Life and Works*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1921), 356–359. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
31. One page from the final part of the treatise has been preserved (§IV.6 [though it is missing a bit at the beginning—], §IV.7. My thanks to Prof. Gideon Bohak for directing my attention to this fragment. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
32. Consisting of two miniature pages, disconnected from the final part of the treatise (§§IV.1–IV.3, §§IV.4–IV.5 [incomplete]). E. Hurvitz, *Catalogue of the Cairo Geniza Fragments in the Westminster College Library, Cambridge* [Hebrew] (New York: Cairo Geniza Institute – Yeshiva University, 2006), 40, 2b. My thanks to Dr. Amir Ashur, who suggested an approximate date for this fragment and offered a characterization of its script. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
33. For the first account, see: A. Neubauer & A. E. Cowley, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, II, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 165. My thanks to Dr. Edna Engel of the Institute for Hebrew Paleography, who suggested an approximate date for these passages and offered a characterization of its script and style. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
34. The commentary was copied right next to the last fragment described. The commentary was published by P. B. Fenton, “An Early Judeo-Arabic Commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah,*” [Hebrew] in eds., E. Fleischer, M.A. Friedman, J.A. Kraemer, *Mas'at Moshe:* *Studies in Jewish and Arabic Culture, Presented to Moshe Gil* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2018), 167–183. According to Fenton’s appraisal (idem, 165 n.13), there is no relation of dependence between the language of the version in this commentary and the language of the treatise copied right next to it and described above. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
35. Barzilay, in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 5 above), 257, lines 26–37, cites a passage from an early commentary. The editor, Shlomo Zalman Hayyim Halberstam, estimated (idem, xi) that the anonymous commentator referred to here predated Saʿadiah. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
36. *Kuzari* IV, 24–27. *Kitāb al-radd wa-l-dalīl fī ad-dīn al-ḍhalīl* by R. Yehudah Halevi, [Hebrew] edited by David H. Baneth and Haggai Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Magnes Press & Israeli Academy of Sciences, 1977), 174–185. For a focused treatment of evidence substantiating this, see: Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 258 and note 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
37. In the third chapter of his book, the anonymous author comments upon *Sefer Yeṣirah*, which he called *Halakhat Yeṣirah*. His citation matches the version and division found in Saʿadiah’s commentary (4, 2)—see *Kitab ma‛ani al-nafs: Buch vom Wesen der Seele*, ed. I. Goldziher, (Berlin: Weidmann, 1907), 10 lines 17–19. We also cannot rule out the possibility that the anonymous author depended upon Saʿadiah’s commentary, which he mentions and discusses thereafter. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
38. Weinstock, “Towards an Explication” (note 4 above), 29 n.62, already suggested as much. On this commentary and its author, see especially: Z. Galili, “On the Question of the Authorship of the Commentary *Or ha-Ganuz,* Attributed to R. Meir ben Solomon Abi Sahula,” [Hebrew] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought,* 4,1–2 (1985): 83–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
39. For an earlier identification of this text as an abridgement of Donnolo’s commentary, see: G. Vajda, ‘Quelques traces de Sabbataï Donnolo dans les commentaires médiévaux du Séfer Yeçira’, *Revue des Études Juives*, 108 (1948), 92–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
40. Identified by Na’ama Ben-Shachar, *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah Attributed to Saʿadiah Gaon: Critical Edition and Introduction* [Hebrew] (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2015), 69–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
41. Idem., 405–415 (=in the edition of the text collected from Donnolo’s commentary, version a). Other manuscripts of this version are listed in idem., 64–65 n.267, manuscripts 1–5 and 8–10 listed. However, a further examination of this text shows that we are dealing with a contamination, and that several passages from the long recension were cited (§§10–22, albeit with some skipping) after the copy from the Genizah-attested version. On this see Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version”(note 4above), 260–262. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
42. Historically, this copy has been classified as “Saʿadiah’s recension”: Weinstock, “Towards an Explication” (note 4 above), 29 (ג8); idem., “Towards an Elucidation” (note 10 above), 39 n.39; Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 4 above), 20; C. Ciucu (ed.), *Bibliothèque nationale de France: Hébreu 763 à 777: Manuscrits de Kabbale* (Manuscrits en caractères hébreux conservés dans les bibliothèques de France: Catalogues, 6) ([Paris] : Bibliothèque nationale de France Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes, Turnhout: Brepols 2014), 151. However, examination of this text revealed that yet another version of *Sefer Yeṣirah* is pasted at the end: fol. 43, line 1–fol. 45, line 22 contains a copy of a version of the “long recension,” beginning at §10 and continuing to the end. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
43. This manuscript was recorded by Epstein, “Studien zum Jezira-Buche und seinen Erklärern,” (note 8 above), 458 n.2. This branch contains a division into eight chapters matching the division found in Saʿadiah’s commentary. However, as Peter Hayman correctly noted in connection with MS London Harley 5510, an examination of the text revealed that it was *not* taken from the version embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary. However, comparisons with the version reflected in the Genizah rotulus revealed the two bore a certain degree of similarity. The end of this copy (fol. 109b, line 4–fol. 110a, line 23) contains a long passage from Judah ha-Levi’s commentary on *Sefer Yeṣirah* taken from his Kuzari, in the translation of Judah ibn Tibbon: MS Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 115, fol. 5b, line 2–fol. 6b, line 4 (Kuzari 4, 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
44. The seventh chapter in this branch coincides with the final two chapters in Saʿadiah’s division. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
45. Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣira* (note 4 above), 20, hypothesized that it depended upon the version contained in Saʿadiah’s commentary. His examination revealed that it should be classified as an independent branch. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
46. For an edition, see: Y.T. Langerman, “A New Redaction of *Sefer Yeṣira*”, *Kabbalah*, 2 (1997), 49–64; for an identification of it as a close textual witness to “Saʿadiah’s recension,” see Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣira* (idem), 20; and compare: E.R. Wolfson, “Text, Context, and Pretext: Review Essay of Yehuda Liebes’s ‘*Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetsira*’, *Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism*, 16 (2004), 220–221. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
47. The three pairs are cited here following the language in the Genizah rotulus, completing missing phrases/words with the text embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary according to MS Oxford Poc. 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
48. MS Oxford Poc. 256 has: 'וצוד'. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
49. This phrase/word is missing in the Genizah rotulus, seemingly due to corruption. It is completed according to MS Oxford Poc. 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
50. This phrase/word is repeated in the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
51. MS Oxford Poc. 256: 'להן'. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
52. Completed according to MS Oxford Poc. 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
53. Should say: המעור. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
54. MS Vatican ebr. 299, fol. 66a. The division into five subsections follows how they are copied in the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
55. It is thus not surprising that the words “and their measure is ten, which have no limit” have been better preserved in this instance in the textual tradition of *Sefer Yesirah* than the other two instances. On this, see: Hayman, *Sefer Yesira* (note 4 above), 75. Also compare Gruenwald’s remarks, “Some Critical Notes" (note 9 above), 489–494. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
56. It should be noted that §6 was added artificially in Gruenwald’s division; it is not represented in the copy in MS Vatican ebr. 299 (note 57 above). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
57. In other textual witnesses to the long and short recensions, the five subsections beginning with the words “ten sefirot belimah” listed above appear in other arrangements. See the examples treated by Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 272–273. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
58. It is thus no wonder that some wished to see this terminology as an artificial addition to the treatise at some later time. See: Weinstock, “Towards a Clarification” (note 4 above), 16, 24, 38 n.1, 44 n.1, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
59. See Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 273–277. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
60. Should say: ח̇ע. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
61. Should say: כ̇ק̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
62. This word was copied twice in the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
63. The addition in parentheses follows MS Oxford Poc. 256 (the version in Saʿadiah’s commetary). [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
64. Corrected according to idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
65. Should say: ח̇ע̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
66. Should say: כ̇ק̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
67. Corrected according to idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
68. Apparently should say: בה. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
69. In MS Oxford Poc. 256: שלש. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
70. Idem: קו ירוק. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
71. Idem.: שמביניהם. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
72. Apparently should say: ממים; see below note 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
73. The sentence in parentheses is missing in the rotulus due to a haplographic error and has been filled in according to MS Oxford Poc. 256, fol. 44a. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
74. MS Cambridge T-S 32.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
75. Qafiḥ, *Sefer Yesirah* (note 2 above), 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
76. =4, 5 in Saʿadiah’s division of text; See: Qafiḥ, *Sefer Yesirah* (idem), 121. On this, see especially: Lambert, “On Das Buch der Schöpfung” (note 7 above), 312; compare: idem., *Saʿadiah’s Commentary* (note 7 above), v. In his edition, Gruenwald delimited this clause as §20, i.e., as a stand-alone dictum. See; Gruenwald, “Critical Edition” (note 4 above), 149; compare: Hayman, *Sefer Yesira* (note 4 above), 104–106. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
77. The text, however, is slightly different (see above §IV.1–II). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
78. It is possible that this “linking repetition” originated in a marginal note and was added to the main body of the text in a copyist’s attempt to restore the text to its original order. The text embedded in Saʿadiah’s commentary, by contrast, contains no such linking. Such repetition is also absent from other branches preserved of this version listed above. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
79. Gruenwald, “Some Critical Notes” (note 9 above), 497–501. Gruenwald left the editorial considerations underlying these errors in need of further study. See: idem., 498 ; also see: Hayman, *Sefer Yesira* (note 4 above), 81, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
80. Once all the pieces have been returned to their supposed original positions, there is no longer a need for this connecting repetition (see above note 85) and therefore I have edited it here with strikethrough. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
81. MS Oxford Poc. 256: 'קו ירוק'. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
82. Idem.: 'שמביניהם'. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
83. Should say: ממים. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
84. See note 78 above about this addition. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
85. Should say: ח̇ע̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
86. Should say: כ̇ק̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
87. This word copied twice in the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
88. See note 68 above about this addition. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
89. See note 69 above about this addition. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
90. Should say: ח̇ע̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
91. Should say: כ̇ק̇. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
92. See note 72 above about this addition. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
93. As mentioned above near note 86, in the other versions and recensions of the treatise, there are other errors and disruptions in the immediate vicinity of this part of the text. This will be further discussed in the rest of this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
94. For a detailed presentation of the four advantages discussed here see: Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 283–285. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
95. MS Vatican ebr. 299, fol. 66b. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
96. Ibid., fol. 67a. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
97. The sentence is ; Donnolo, *Sefer Ḥakhmoni* (note 4 above), 170 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
98. The repeating sentence is 'עשר ספירות בלימה אחת רוח אלהים חיים שתים רוח מרוח'; idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
99. MS Vatican ebr. 299, fol. 66a–b. See above near note 86. It should be added that the intervention of this sentence also creates a repetition identical to the sentence that concludes the continuation of this passage (§16).. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
100. See for example the short recension version here attested by Judah b. Barzilay of Barcelona, *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah* (above note 5), p. 106: שתים רוח מרוח וחקק וחצב בה || עשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד שלש אמות שבע כפולות וי"ב פשוטות || ורוח אחד ביניהם'. (the text has been corrected according to MS Jerusalem, The National Library of Israel Heb. 24°699, fol. 65b). Compare other early witnesses of this recension, like that preserved in the commentary attributed to Dunash ben Tamim: MS Cambridge University Library T-S Ar. 43.100, fols. 2b–5a + 1a. See G. Vajda, ‘Nouveaux fragments arabes du commentaire de Dunash b. Tamim sur le «Livre de la Création»’, *Revue des Études Juives*, 113 (1954), pp. 41–45. See further: Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 288–290. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
101. Lambert suggested that Saʿadiah’s version may have been neglected for mnemonic reasons; see Lambert, *Commentaire* (note 7 above), vi. Cùscito recently suggested that a few passages of *Sefer Yeṣirah* might have had a mnemonic function. See: G.M. Cùscito, ‘Mnemotechnics in *Sefer Yeṣira*’, *Materia giudaica*, 23 (2018): 307–316. For a general discussion of methods of recollection and structure in Rabbinic literature and other cultures in the antique world, see Shlomo Naeh, “*Omanut ha-Zikaron*: Mivnim shel zikaron, u-tavniyot shel text be-sifrut Hazal,” [Hebrew] *Meḥqarei Talmud,* 3 (2005), 543–589. Also see below, note 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
102. On this subject, see especially: Tz. Weiss, ‘“The Book of Formation of the World”: *Sefer Yetzirah* and *Hilkhot Yetzirah*’, *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*, 27 (2019), 177–179. On the identification of *Sefer Yeṣirah* with the hilkhot yeṣirah mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, see: idem., 168–171, note 10, and the scholarship mentioned therein. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
103. For an attempt to connect the unique form of *Sefer Yeṣirah* with the development of the encyclopedia as the latter emerged in scientific-occult writing and religious production in Shi’ite circles of the ninth century, see S. Wasserstrom, “Sefer Yeṣira and Early Islam: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*, 3 (1993): 21–26. See also idem., “Further Thoughts on the Origins of *Sefer yesirah*,” *Aleph*, 2 (2002): 201–221. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
104. T.Y. Langermann, “On the Beginnings of Hebrew Scientific Literature and on Studying History through ‘Maqbilot’ (Parallels)”, *Aleph*, 2 (2002): 169–176. Langermann connected *Sefer Yeṣirah* in its common form to treatises with scientific characteristics that were composed presumably from the eighth century onwards, one of the characteristics of which is a form similar to the subsections. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
105. On this, see especially: M. Weiss, “Mishnayot sefurot be-rosh masekhet,” [Hebrew] *Sidra* 1 (1985): 33–44. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
106. Y. N. Epstein, *Introduction to Tannaitic Literature: Mishna, Tosephta and Halakhic Midrashim* [Hebrew](Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1957), 72; for a broader discussion, see: Naeh, “Omanut ha-Zikaron” (note 119 above), 563–570 and 582–586, on the analysis of methods of editing the tractate *Eduyot* in the mishnah. For a general overview of this type as found in the sources of rabbinic literature, see W.S. Towner, *The Rabbinic ‘Enumeration of Scriptural Examples’: A Study of a Rabbinic Pattern of Discourse with Special Reference to Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), and especially the section on Tannaitic literature therein, 118–213, with examples on 214–243. For a discussion of this phenomenon in treatises contained in the Genizah, see: M. Lavi and S. Fogel, “A Unique Treatise from the Genizah Containing Biblical Verses and Exempla: Edition and Introduction,” [Hebrew] *Ginze Qedem,* 18 (2022), 116–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
107. On this treatise and its witnesses in the Genizah, see: J. Olszowy-Schlanger, ‘Un rotulus du midrash Pirqa de-Rabbenu ha-Qadosh de la Geniza du Caire’, *Annuaire de l’École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), Section des sciences historiques et philologiques*, 145 (2014), 26–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
108. Weinstock, “Towards an Explication” (note 4 above) suggested in his eclectic edition that various additions and expansions had been appended to versions of the book throughout the generations. From among these and the different versions, he selected the “earliest, original version” (per his own definition). According to his assessment, the original was the shortest of all the versions, but expanded until the short and long recensions gradually emerged. Gruenwald, “Critical Notes” (note 9 above), especially pp. 475–479, based on the findings of his eclectic edition, proposed that the first chapter as found in its form in the short and long recensions (and which contains the sections on “ten sefirot belimah”), be separated from the rest of the book, and that each of these two parts be seen as a text whose fundamental source derives from a distinct historical context, only adjoined in a later stage of editing. As noted by Gruenwald, this proposal is similar in principle to Gershom Scholem’s hypothesis that two different cosmogonical theories—one revolving around the letters and another revolving around the sefirot—are blended in *Sefer Yeṣirah*. See: G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R.J.Z. Werblowsky, trans. A. Arkush, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987), 28–29; and compare idem, ‘Sefer Yeẓirah’, *Encyclopedia Judaica*2, XXI, 329. For a proposal that *three* distinct cosmogonical doctrines be identified in *Sefer Yeṣirah* together with a suggestion of how they correspond to three different parts of the book in the order found in the short and long recensions, see: Séd, “Le Sēfer Yezīrā” (note 9 above), 522–526. For a different proposal identifying three cosmogonical accounts blended with one another in *Sefer Yeṣirah* and based on a literary-stylistic analysis of the book, principally on the language and form of the short version, see: R. Meroz, “Between Sefer Yezirah and Wisdom Literature: Three Binitarian Approaches in Sefer Yezirah”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 6,18 (2007): 101–142. In contrast, Hayman, basing his analyses on the precedence of the short version to the other versions and seeking to reconstruct “the earliest recoverable text” on the basis of existing textual witnesses, proposed to distinguish this latter from the urtext, which could not be supported by any direct textual witnesses; ed. Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 4 above), 49–51; see also his detailed presentation immediately prior: idem., 6–8, 33–41; and similarly see: A.P. Hayman, “The ‘Original Text’ of Sefer Yeṣira or the ‘Earliest Recoverable Text’?”, R. Rezetko, T.H. Lim & W.B. Aucker (eds.), *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 175–186. This reconstruction too is based on an eclectic attempt to clarify the text in each and every instance such that it is possible to explicate the emergence of the different versions, while still relying on the assumption that *Sefer Yeṣirah* predominantly underwent a process of expansion (see Hayman, *Sefer Yeṣirah*, idem., 33–34). For criticisms of Hayman’s attempt to clarify an independent, fundamental text from the three primary versions, see especially: Herrmann, *Sefer Yeṣirah* (note 12 above), 207–218, who put forward a different proposal concerning the emergence of the various versions. His criticism served as the basis for his edition of the book in translation into German, in which he presented each of the three primary versions on the basis of the earliest manuscript(s) of each. A similar critique was put forward a few years later by Abrams, “Kabbalistic Manuscripts” (note 14 above), 459–464. Finally, Meir bar-Ilan presented yet another edition of the reconstructed text, faithful in both scope and order to the long version, and again based on the assumption that the long version reflects the most expansive form of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, the result of the text’s being expanded over the generations through various additions. M. Bar-Ilan, *Astrology and Other Sciences among the Jews of the Land of Israel: The Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Eras* [Hebrew](Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2010), 61–62, 312–324—appendix A also contains “an astrological reconstructed edition”, which, according to the editor, helped to determine the “correct” version of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
109. Fifty-three sections or parts of sections out of the sixty-two sections documented in the long recension (i.e., sans §§50–51, which were compiled in Gruenwald’s edition on the basis of texts of the short version—) have either complete or partial parallels in the early Genizah-attested version; however, as is to be expected, they occur there following a different (and in my opinion, the original) order of chapters and sections, and occasionally with other minor variations in esp. the opening (the reasons for and details of this transitions were described in chapter four above). The sections are: §§1–10, §§12–20, §§23–26, §§32–41, §§43c–49a, §§52–60a, §§61a, §62 (§53 and §56 are missing in the early text contained in MS Vatican ebr. 299). As for the eleven remaining sections (and four parts of sections), it is reasonable to assume that they were all additions, i.e., annotations or glosses that eventually made their way into this version. For a detailed explanation of this claim, see Bar-Asher, “The Earliest Extant Version” (note 4 above), 307–309 and note 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
110. See note 14 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)